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“From a Photograph”

*All shadows once were free;  
But wingless now are we,  
And doomed henceforth to be  
In Light's Captivity.*

John B. Tabb



**University of Alberta**

**“As if I Had Wings to Fly”:  
The Victorian “Cult of Feminine Beauty”.  
Through the Lens of Julia Margaret Cameron’s Pre-Raphaelite Camera**

by

Jill Marie MacLachlan



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English

Edmonton, Alberta

Fall 1999





**University of Alberta**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "*As if I Had Wings to Fly*": *The Victorian "Cult of Feminine Beauty" Through the Lens of Julia Margaret Cameron's Pre-Raphaelite Camera* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.





## DEDICATION

This undertaking is dedicated to my grandfather, Peter, whose kindness has touched many, and whose strength and vigour continue to amaze and inspire; to the memory of my grandmother, Adeline, who filled our hearts, bodies, and minds with courage and comfort; to my father, who set our lives to music; and, to my mother, who nurtured my love of language, and who “gave me such encouragement that I felt as if I had wings to fly with.”



Gertrude Kasëbier, *Blessed Art Thou Among Women*, 1899.





## ABSTRACT

This thesis undertakes a feminist examination of the life, works, and representations of nineteenth-century British photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron, within the context of both Victorian and late twentieth-century visual and literary culture.

In the first chapter, I consider Victorian theories of art and photography, in order to show how Cameron's art photographs influenced, informed, and subverted various aspects of Victorian visual culture. Utilizing Joan Riviere's concept of the "womanliness masquerade," I then attempt to counter generally accepted critical and biographical constructions of Cameron as passive, amateurish, and "decidedly feminine." by reading her autobiography, "Annals of My Glass House," as a highly self-conscious moment of literary self-production.

In Chapter Two, I explore both Cameron's subversive and conservative "views" on Victorian ideologies of gender and class (particularly as they pertain to the Pre-Raphaelite Cult of Feminine Beauty), expressed through her fine art photographs of "fair women," and her poem, "On a Portrait."

In the final chapter, my focus shifts back towards the woman artist herself, as I examine how and why Cameron has been represented by three twentieth-century artists: Virginia Woolf, in her play, *Freshwater*, novelist Lynne Truss, in her book, *Tennyson's Gift*, and contemporary film-maker Sandra Goldbacher, in her movie, *The Governess*.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

My personal interest in Victorian photography aside, this project is primarily the end result of my own dissatisfaction with the critical, biographical, and aesthetic constructions of Victorian art photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron, which have appeared in the century that has elapsed since her death in 1879. After having conducted my own research into Cameron's life and works, it is my general sense that most contemporary critical analyses of Cameron have tended to focus their energies on recuperating the reputation of her photographs from vituperative Victorian reviewers and condescending biographers (particularly her photos of women and her Pre-Raphaelite *tableaux*, which have, until very recently, still been considered amateurish and not worthy of serious critical attention); very few have been concerned with attempting to rescue Cameron's own reputation from Helmut Gernsheim and other early twentieth-century critics who have created and circulated potentially damaging constructions of her as a bumbling, naive, and decidedly "feminine" amateur.

In the same way that most (re)viewers of Cameron's work have refused to see her use of soft focus as conscious and deliberate, and have instead attributed the haziness of her photos to "accident," defective equipment, or poor eyesight, many recent critics have deemed any potentially subversive strains appearing in either Cameron's life or her art as "unintentional."<sup>1</sup> Other extant studies of Cameron have "overlooked" any incongruencies

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<sup>1</sup> According to Gerhard Joseph, "[i]t has been suggested by Colin Ford that Julia Margaret Cameron's addiction to blurred focus has its own source in an 'infirmity of vision' that marked several of her children" (47).





or potentially transgressive strains altogether, in order to enforce a reading of both the woman and her photographs as unproblematically “conservative.”<sup>2</sup>

This has particularly been the case in discussions of Cameron’s approach to Victorian gender ideology (again, in her life as well as in her art)--the most recent being Carol Mavor’s critique of Cameron’s “Madonna” photos, in her book *Pleasures Taken*. Overall, Mavor’s analysis provides a sensitive, broad-ranging, and extremely compelling reading of Cameron’s “Madonna” studies. But while Mavor’s work is particularly successful in its argument for the subversive potential of the technique and style of Cameron’s photography, it tends to negate Cameron’s active agency in the creative process. Even as she points out that “one must not overlook the fact that women and other ‘naives’ have been historically read as more unconscious of what they are up to” (137), Mavor hesitates to see the transgressive elements of Cameron’s life as the result of deliberate effort. Instead, she forcefully asserts (not once, but twice) that Cameron was “not [necessarily] consciously critiquing its [femininity’s image]” (47), before completely withdrawing from what she calls the “extremely tiresome” and “unanswerable” debates over artistic intentionality that, to her mind, only “detract from the finished work” (137). Obviously, Mavor is not the first critic to find the act of literary excavation “extremely tiresome,” not to mention overwhelmingly frustrating. The question of “intention” is one that has

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<sup>2</sup> One such critic is Mike Weaver, a prolific historian of photography, whose book *Julia Margaret Cameron 1815-1879* is still one of the few texts that consider the Victorian photographer and her work in any great detail. At first glance, Weaver’s biography of Cameron seems quite celebratory. Setting himself apart from those critics “who aim to rob her of her dignity as a woman and artist,” he writes that “Julia Margaret Cameron entered the world of the Royal Academy and Salon painters with confidence” and “there was nothing pseudonymous about Julia Margaret Cameron.” He even refers to Cameron as a “pioneer professional” belonging to “that great generation of Victorian novelists . . . which included the Brontes and George Eliot,” and suggests that “if it were not so unfashionable, [he] would have called [her] a genius.” Yet, after all his praise for her genius and strength of character, Weaver’s puzzlingly over-simplified final assessment is that “for all her abundance of energy,” Cameron was most definitely “a feminine rather than a feminist artist” (14). It is this desire to undermine the subversive strains in Cameron’s life and art that my own work seeks to interrogate and overturn.



plagued generations of critics, academics, and historians dealing with long-dead subjects; even with the aid of private diary entries and “eye-witness accounts” provided by close friends and confidantes, we can never know for certain what Julia Margaret Cameron’s exact intentions were, as a woman *or* as an artist. However, contrary to the beliefs of Modernist critics (who completely disavowed the role of the author’s subjectivity or a work’s historical context in the construction of a text’s meaning, in order to enforce a neat, monolithic New Critical way of reading and “knowing” literature), as Annabel Patterson points out in her own discussion of “intention” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, “to eliminate problems is *not* to solve them” (144). Certainly, those previous critics and biographers of Cameron who deemed her an “incompetent,” or an “unskilled amateur” did not allow the same sort of factual incertitude stop them from labelling either the woman or her work definitively “feminine.” Why should we withhold any politicised reading of Cameron’s life and art that may, potentially, recuperate even “one grain” of integrity to both?

Considering the very recent date of Mavor’s work, I find it a surprisingly negligent move on her part (both as a late twentieth-century *feminist*, as well as a *Victorianist*) to remove herself from the “intention” debate altogether. For, Mavor must certainly be aware of the work that faces contemporary academics: not only in the way of recuperating and re-(e)valu(at)ing the lives and works of *women* artists who have for too long been neglected by patriarchal canons of art and culture, but also the works and lives of the Victorians, who, as pointed out by Isobel Armstrong in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*, are in dire need of reconsideration following the Modernist movement’s





attempts to repress this period and its eminent citizens (male or female)--at least, if the study of Victorian literature and history is to continue with any level of seriousness.

Thus, armed with the knowledge that literary criticism is highly conjectural at the best of times, and, as pointed out by Patterson, that, as far as the intention debate is concerned, “we [critics] are not required to be regulatory on the subject,” it is my *intention* in this thesis to provide a potential counter-argument to such over-simplified readings of Cameron and her art. In this work, I wish to assert not only the potentially subversive nature of Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographic technique and aesthetic aspirations within nineteenth-century visual culture, but also the ways in which Cameron (in life and in art) may have actively and deliberately sought to resist and subvert a conservative nineteenth-century patriarchal construction of gender, and, more specifically, of ideal bourgeois femininity. To achieve this end, I will begin with an analysis of both the woman and her art within the context of Victorian visual culture, and their relationship to the emerging debates surrounding the role, place, and function of the new technology of photography; for, in order to negotiate both the subversive and conservative potential of Cameron’s work, I must carefully consider the historico-cultural context within which--or against which, as the case may be--Cameron may be said to be working, and the ways in which her work has been historically received and perceived. In the latter part of the first chapter, I will attempt to emphasize Cameron’s intelligence, industriousness, and, most importantly, her agency, by suggesting that we read her autobiography, “Annals of My Glass House” (1873), as a highly self-conscious, openly performative, and fiercely strategic moment of literary self-production.



In Chapter Two, I will return to a discussion of femininity and representation, as I explore Cameron's paradoxical role in the subversion and perpetuation of the Victorian ideology of ideal femininity, and most particularly, of the theories and practices of gender representation favored by the Pre-Raphaelite "Cult of Feminine Beauty," through an examination of her art photographs of "Fair Women," and her poem, "On a Portrait." In order to contextualize my arguments properly, I will examine these texts alongside exemplary paintings by Pre-Raphaelite Brother, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and poetry by Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal, the most prominent Pre-Raphaelite women.

I will then regard Cameron as product, rather than producer, of literary and pictorial culture in Chapter Three, as I examine early and late twentieth-century representations of the eccentric Victorian art photographer in Virginia Woolf's play, *Freshwater* (1923/35), Lynne Truss's novel, *Tennyson's Gift* (1996), and, most recently, Sandra Goldbacher's film, *The Governess* (1998). My analysis here draws upon Isobel Armstrong's recent work in *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*, and Elisabeth Bronfen's concept of "representational violence." My goal in this chapter will be not only to assess the damage accrued upon Cameron's image by Modernist attacks on the "eccentric" Victorian photographer, but also to explore Cameron's own paradoxical participation in the "representational violence" that would later come to afflict her post-mortem memory in the late twentieth century.

\*

While it is my primary objective to underscore the problems inherent in the tendencies of critics to overlook Cameron's active agency and the transgressive views





expressed through her lived life, as well as through her art, I do not wish to place my own work completely at odds with the work of all other Cameron critics. This thesis is not so much a reaction against, as an extension or elaboration of, several prominent analyses of Cameron's life and art; therefore, it is at this moment that I would like to express my indebtedness to those critics whose own writing and research influenced my own process of thinking about Cameron, and, in many ways, provided the foundation upon which my own work has been built.

The two critics who have most obviously informed this undertaking are Deborah Cherry and Carol Mavor, for both were the first to use the term "masquerade" when discussing Cameron. Although Cherry and Mavor use the term "masquerade" to describe, very briefly and somewhat ambiguously, the *tableaux-vivants* style of Cameron's photographs, or, in the case of Mavor, to refer merely to Cameron's highly dramatic personality, their evocation of the concept undoubtedly contributed to the more extensive reading of Cameron as a "social performer" in a "womanliness masquerade," that I have presented here.

My work on Cameron has also been strongly informed by Victoria C. Olsen's essay, "Idylls of Real Life." Although I disagree with Olsen's hesitancy to read Cameron's work as "feminist," her introductory assessment of Cameron's "Idylls" photographs is very much in line with my own sense of Cameron's other photographs of "Fair Women," not to mention her own life; I too see Cameron's life and art "as both reflecting and transforming essentialized Victorian gender and class identities [as] she construct[ed] paradoxical 'idylls of real life' that blur categories and distinctions" (371).



I am also grateful to Pamela Gerrish Nunn and Jan Marsh. They were the first to draw a parallel between Cameron and other more prominent Pre-Raphaelite “Sisters,” like Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal, who also in some ways conformed to, and, in other ways, subverted Pre-Raphaelite theories of artistic production and gender representation. My analysis of Cameron’s poetry in relation to representative poetical works by Rossetti and Siddal will, I hope, contribute to the campaign started by Gerrish Nunn and Marsh in their book, Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement, to position Cameron (and indeed the other Pre-Raphaelite women) in a more prominent place in canons of literature, as well as visual art and photography.

\*

Like Julia Margaret Cameron’s poem, “On a Portrait” (Appendix), this project is a call to future critics, historians, and academics to “tune thy song[s] right and paint rare harmonies” where Cameron’s life and art are concerned. And, like Cameron herself, I hope to capture on paper an image of the famous woman photographer (complete with her inner as well as outer “complexion”) that readers will find more “startlingly alive and surprisingly real” than previous portraits of Cameron have tended to be.





**GETTING FRAMED, GETTING (UN)FOCUSSED:**  
 Julia Margaret Cameron and/in Victorian Visual Culture

[I] believe in other than mere conventional topographic photography -- map-making and skeleton rendering of feature and form without the roundness and fulness [sic] of force and feature, that modelling of flesh and limb, which the focus I use only can give, tho' called and condemned as "out of focus." What is focus -- and who has a right to say what focus is the legitimate focus?

*Julia Margaret Cameron,*  
 (qtd in Smith, *New Feminist Discourse*, 248).

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Julia Margaret Cameron, the woman whom twentieth-century critics would come to call the greatest pictorial photographer of the nineteenth century, was twenty-four when, in 1839, Jacques Louis Daguerre made public his discovery of the process of photography in Paris.<sup>3</sup> At this time, Cameron was still living in her native India and so may have remained somewhat distanced from the great social disruption that rocked Europe and Britain as philosophers, social critics, and lay people alike contemplated the potential impact of daguerrotypy.<sup>4</sup> But, however geographically removed Cameron may have been from Britain's cultural centres at the time of the unveiling of photographic technology, it is highly unlikely that she was not aware of, if not actively participating in, any number of parlour-room debates taking place in Anglo-Indian high society circles regarding the proposed impact of the new mechanical eye. After all, she was the refined,

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<sup>3</sup> Helmut Gernsheim and Mike Weaver both refer to Cameron as ostensibly "the greatest pictorial photographer" of the Victorian age.

<sup>4</sup> Lindsay Smith, a prominent social historian of the nineteenth century, whose own work has taken as its focus the origins and effects of what she calls a cultural "obsession with the visual" during the reign of Queen Victoria, goes so far as to suggest that, of a broad range of optical aids and devices to have their advent in the nineteenth century (such as the stereoscope, the microscope, or diorama), it is "the invention of the camera and the public announcement of daguerrotypy in Paris in 1839" that "signalled an unprecedented disturbance in a wide range of cultural investments in the visual" for the Victorians (3).



well-educated daughter of an affluent Anglo-Indian magistrate and a wealthy aristocrat, and the young wife of Charles Hay Cameron, a philosopher and member of the Law Commission of the Supreme Council of India. Moreover, as the flurry of articles and letters circulating in the popular press of the day can attest, photography was a widely debated, and often heatedly contested practice in the nineteenth century, and its influence (for better or worse) reached into virtually every eschelon of European and British societies.

That the members of various British artistic *coteries* regarded the photogenic process with a great deal of skepticism, resentment, and in some instances, fear, is not surprising, considering the suggestions being made by many of photography's creators and promoters during the first few years following photography's public unveiling: namely, that not only would the camera's abilities soon surpass those of the artist, but that even the untutored amateur could soon capture nature in greater detail than even the most highly skilled painter trained at the Royal Academy in the techniques of realist portraiture. In France, for example, shortly after the introduction daguerrotypy, one rather dramatic anonymous newspaper article reiterated a growing concern harboured by many artists about their role within an increasingly industrialized society, as well as the function of the *beaux-arts* in an age that revered the mechanically reproduced image, by suggesting that "thanks to [the camera] one will see vanishing at the same stroke landscapists, portraitists, ornamental painters and all other artists" (qtd in Scharf 8).

In order to assuage such fears that the camera--with its abilities to faithfully reproduce in a pure, objective manner "the surface of objects, the frittered crumblyness



[sic] of stone, the crisp wrinkles of tree-bark” (qtd in Scharf 8)--threatened to supplant the Victorian artist who strove for a similar exactitude in his or her realist art, many artists and critics of the period were careful to assert photography’s role and place as antithetical and inferior to art. Being a machine with gears that required its operators to possess at least a basic knowledge of elementary chemistry, the camera was thought to be more closely aligned with science, and, as such, more suited for empirical endeavours than for accessing and capturing the realm of the ideal.<sup>5</sup> Further, as prominent Victorian art critic John Ruskin pointed out, while photos could more carefully capture textures and fine details, there were some areas in which the human artist was superior: in particular, colour. Photographic technology was such that the camera could still not reproduce the rich, vibrant colours of the “purest, most innocent, and most precious” things. Asking readers of his 1856 book *Modern Painters IV* to “[c]onsider for a little while what sort of a world it would be if all flowers were grey, all leaves black, and the sky brown,” Ruskin made a forceful point that, at least for the moment, there were some areas in which human creation could still not be surpassed by photographic machinery (qtd in Smith 1).

Although the generally accepted appel for a finished photograph was a “picture,” it was the consensus amongst many artists and photographers alike that, unlike a painting, which was “made” through the organic process of artistic creation, a photograph was a pre-existing picture of reality that was merely “taken” from “real life” and reproduced in permanent form on a metal or glass plate, and later, onto paper. Most critics on both sides of the photographic debates concurred that the photographer had no hand at all in the

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<sup>5</sup> The terms “ideal” and “real” are Cameron’s own, used to articulate the separate spheres of art and realism. It is not to be confused with Lacan’s sense of the “real,” for example.





creation of a picture--that, in fact, photography was a process whereby nature could now be “self-painted by . . . rectilinear pencils of light” (qtd in Smith, “Idylls of Real Life,” 372). Thus, while a painting was often the result of an idea sparked in an artist’s mind, or the external manifestation of an originary impression of a natural scene upon an individual subjectivity, it was considered undesirable, if not impossible, that the photographers’ personalities, emotions, or individualities would ever come to intrude into the final result of a picture taken through the camera’s “objective” eye in the way that an artist’s work exhibited its creator’s mark of individual style.

\*

Most practitioners of photography held tenaciously to the rules and standards of realism being placed upon the function, technique, and style of photo-taking by the burgeoning photographic societies, and sought to uphold a careful division of the artistic from the photographic. However, as Pierre Bourdieu has discovered in his work on the social history of photography in Western culture,

alongside the great mass of users of photography there existed a small group of photographers who, either by choice or by professional obligation . . . wish[ed] to subvert mainstream photographic practice [of the Realist school], technically exploit the ordinary representation of photographic objectivity, or, on the contrary, attempt to load a “realistic” figuration with a symbolic content [in order] to break with the canons of the popular aesthetic and grant photography a recognized place in the system of the fine arts . . . (102).

With her aspirations to “ennoble Photography and secure for it the character and uses of High Art by combining the Real and the Ideal and sacrificing nothing of Truth by all possible devotion to Poetry and [B]eauty” (qtd in Lukitsh 19), Julia Margaret Cameron occupied a central place within one such emergent *avant-garde* group. This group, known as the “pictorialist” or “fine-art” photographers, consisted mostly of middle- to



upper-class men, some of them artists trained in the study of painting but amateurs in the practice of photography, who deliberately reacted against society's adamant separation of the two realms of "objective" Real photography and "subjective" Ideal art. In precisely the manner outlined by Bourdieu, Cameron and her male contemporaries hoped to distinguish themselves from the hacks, amateurs, and commercial photographers of the day by combining the various stylistic and formalistic elements of both "ideal" art and "real" photography into a new, subversive form of fine-art photography.

Like Henry Peach Robinson, O.G. Rejlander, and other members of the burgeoning group of experimental art photographers, Julia Margaret Cameron sought inspiration for the artistic portion of her photos from a variety of famous paintings. Cameron's early works, for example, bear the influence of such Old Master painters in the Italian school of art as Giotto, Luini, Leonardo da Vinci, and Titian, while her creative use of lighting has been often compared to the "Rembrandt effect" in painting. Similarly, her use of soft-focus to create a hazy, often aura-like quality around her subjects has been likened to the painting technique known as *sfumato* (Howard).

While she called her early pictures "Raphaelesque," many of her photos bear the influence of Pre-Raphaelitism in both style and content, which is not surprising, since she was closely associated with several prominent figures working within the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood; the Burne-Joneses, William Holman-Hunt, and the Rossettis were all frequent visitors to the Cameron estate on the Isle of Wight.

Like Cameron, the Pre-Raphaelites were dedicated to making a radical break from the Royal Academy's artistic tradition, while still sating the public appetite for exactitude





by combining the teachings of Ruskin's "truth in nature" principles of Realist painting with allegorical or symbolic content. Pre-Raphaelite painter George Frederick Watts was Cameron's particularly close friend and mentor, who not only had a significant impact on Cameron's emerging aesthetic, but who in fact later emulated Cameron's own "hazy" style in his attempts to transform the genre of painted portraiture. In one letter to Cameron, Watts remarked upon the affinities between her style of photo-taking and his painterly technique: "I can well appreciate what is noblest in your art, and your last photographs harmonise well with the effect I wish to produce." Similarly, on the mount of a photographic portrait of Florence Fisher taken by Cameron he expressed his "wish that I could have painted such a picture as this" (qtd in Hinton 44).

For the most part, Cameron received a great deal of support for her work, especially from the *coterie* of artists and philosophers that gathered at her Isle of Wight home. But while artists like Watts gave her "such encouragement that I felt as if I had wings to fly with" (qtd in Weaver 157), the reception her art photos received from the wider photographic community was much less enthusiastic. Apparently, it was Cameron's particular (and deliberate) use of the new technique of "soft focus" that incited the most vituperative comments from both critics from the photographic press and fellow art photographers alike. For, although the more artistic aspects of the medium were being explored in areas such as theme and composition, as far as style and technique were concerned, photography was still, in the words of art photographer Henry Peach Robinson, "pre-eminently the art of definition" (qtd in Mavor 64). As such, work like Cameron's, seen exhibiting anything other than clear, defined, crisp resolution, and thus, deviating from dominant photographic standard, was deemed technically imperfect. One



critic writing for the *British Journal of Photography* criticized both Cameron's art, and a fellow critic who attempted to find merit in her use of "soft" focus:

The art critic of the *Athenaeum* in a recent notice of certain photographic portraits by Mrs. Cameron indulges in some observations, which, seeing the quarter whence they come, are highly complementary to the lady; but we think they will be received with a smile of incredulity by photographers generally. If the critic in question knew anything practically of photography he would not surely insinuate that photographs ought to be "out of focus" in order to be effective (qtd in Lukitsh 43).

Similarly, an article appearing in the *Photographic Journal* in 1868 exemplifies the ways in which male critics deployed their cultural authority, not only to regulate and uphold the aesthetic and stylistic integrity of the photographic art from the bumbling amateur, but to berate women's work in order to uphold a tradition of male artistic production, while blocking female participation in the "masculine" art world: "Mrs. Cameron exhibits her series of out-of-focus [photos]. . . . We must give this lady credit for daring originality, but at the expense of all other photographic qualities [ . . . ] [W]e are sorry to have to speak thus severely on the works of a lady, but we feel compelled to do so in the name of art" (qtd in Gernsheim 28).

Lewis Carroll, a some-time friend and colleague of Cameron's, expressed a similar sentiment in a personal journal entry, wherein he spoke of a secret desire to "do over" Cameron's "shoddy" photographs: "In the evening Mrs. Cameron and I had a mutual exhibition of photographs. [S]ome are very picturesque--some merely hideous--however, she talks of them as if they were triumphs of art. She wished she could have had some of *my* subjects to do out of focus--and I expressed an analogous wish with regards to some of her subjects" (qtd in Mavor 63).



While hardly surprising, responses such as those expressed by Carroll, or those appearing in the photographic journals of the day, are nevertheless informative; for they not only illuminate the potentially subversive nature of Cameron's fine-art photography within the context of Victorian visual culture, but they reveal that, as a female artist, Julia Margaret Cameron was, in and of herself, also a site of cultural anxiety in the nineteenth century. Indeed, at a time when, according to Griselda Pollock, "the role ascribed to the feminine position" was carefully limited by the Victorian ideology of divided spheres to "art's object, the model, or its muse by virtue of a romantic affiliation with the artist" (96), Julia Margaret Cameron sought for herself a reputation as one of art photography's top *producers*. As a woman armed with the new technology of the machine (a technology associated with industry, progress, and culture, domains which, in the nineteenth century, were considered the places of men), Cameron seriously threatened to transgress Victorian codes of bourgeois respectability and ideal femininity by her desire to gain for herself the kind of prestige and financial reward enjoyed by Britain's most famous illustrator, Gustave Doré, and even the nation's Poet Laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, while critics like Carroll were undeniably harsh and condescending towards both the woman and her work, Cameron seems to have avoided the social stigmatization which followed many other women like her, who, in their "manly" ambitions to expand or defy the place and role ascribed to them as virtuous angels, wives, and mothers, were claimed to have "unsex'd" themselves. On the contrary, the critics' continual reference to

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<sup>6</sup> In a letter Cameron wrote around the time of her collaboration with Tennyson on an illustrated volume of his poetry (1874), she expressed her desire to gain "one single grain of the momentous mountain heap of profits the poetical part of the work brings into Alfred" (qtd in Gernsheim 46). In another letter to Herschel: "Doré got a fortune for his drawn fancy illustrations of these Idylls. Now . . . my large photographs, the one for instance illustrating Elaine, who is May Prinsep . . . at her very best would [certainly] excite more sensation and interest than all the drawings of Doré" (qtd in Gernsheim 59).





Cameron as the “lady” and “Mrs.” Cameron would seem to suggest that most men found Cameron to be the image of Victorian womanliness and respectability.

How is it, then, that despite her declarations to Herschel and other male confidantes that she *deliberately* sought to defy convention as a fine art photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron was, for the most part, able to occupy those spaces of woman and artist simultaneously? Why was Cameron allowed and even encouraged by her husband and many prominent male artists and contemporaries such as G. F. Watts, to pursue her study of art photography? How is it that she appears to have avoided the social stigmatization surrounding the professional female artist in the nineteenth century?

In her analysis of Cameron’s life and work in *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs*, Carol Mavor suggests that “[Cameron] greatly reduced the risk of compromising her ‘femininity’” because she was “in many ways, the traditional bourgeois Victorian woman . . . [giving] birth to six children,” before taking up photography as a hobby, “after her children were grown, at the age of forty-eight” (45). Indeed, due to the relatively “late” age at which she commenced her study and practice of photography, and due to her married status, Cameron avoided the kind of risk to her social reputation that faced a young, unmarried woman in the nineteenth century who had not yet fulfilled her expected feminine function as wife and mother.<sup>7</sup>

While quite persuasive, such a description proves inadequate (as Mavor herself appears to recognize) in completely “capturing” a woman whose life, as whose art, was so

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<sup>7</sup> It must be further noted that, although Cameron was very much the loving, involved mother--not only to her own six children, but to several adopted girls--she was also a woman of relative affluence and privilege, who had access to maidservants and nannies who could help in the primary care of her numerous children. Thus, even if she had taken up photography at an earlier age, like many women of the “leisured class,” she would certainly have found herself with free time to commit to her art.



completely fraught with “unexpected contradictions” that many readers (myself included) have found both “almost impossible to describe” (qtd in Hinton 33). Indeed, if we are to rely on contemporary “eye-witness” accounts contained within the letters and journal entries of Cameron’s acquaintances, neighbours, friends, and family, who have undertaken such a difficult task of description, we are confronted with an image, not, as suggested by Mavor, of a “traditional bourgeois woman,” but, rather, of a woman who “played the game of life with vivid courage and disregard for ordinary rules” (qtd in Hinton 33).

Even in her younger days in India, Julia Margaret Cameron (*née* Pattle) and her sisters were considered quite exceptional. According to one contemporary, Anglo-Indian society was divided into “men, women, and Pattles.” While her two older sisters were known for their beauty and charm, Julia (being the plainest and apparently least visually pleasing of the girls), was most admired for her intelligence and wit. Despite, or, as Sir Henry Taylor offered, *because* of the place of prominence which she was called upon to hold as both the wife of Charles Hay Cameron and, in the absence of the Governor-General’s wife, as the unofficial head of European society in India, she was said to have felt in her later life a clear “distaste for all cold and formal conventions, in particular the excessive forms which they tend[ed] to take in Anglo-Indian society” (Gernsheim 13), and a surprising amount of “contempt for the ways of the world” (Woolf 15).

To those more conservative visitors at the house the Camerons later occupied in England at Putney, and, after 1860, on the Isle of Wight at Dimbola, Cameron’s resistance to propriety and stiff Victorian social mores were most apparent, both in the management of her household (or lack thereof), and in the unrestrained manner in which she was observed to dress, speak, and “act,” in the presence of maids-of-all-work and poet



laureates alike. Lady Ritchie, daughter of eminent Victorian novelist, W.M. Thackeray, and a life-long friend of Mrs. Cameron, was a particularly keen observer who took it upon herself during a visit to Dimbola to list in her diary--with a kind of interested horror--all of Julia's less than lady-like attributes:

I remember a strange apparition in a flowing red velvet dress, although it was summer time, cordially welcoming us to a fine house and some belated meal, when the attendant butler was addressed by her as 'Man,' and was ordered to do many things for our benefit. . . . When we left, she came with us bareheaded, with trailing draperies, part of the way to the station, as her kind habit was (qtd in Gernsheim 14-15).

Cameron was not only in the habit of walking about, body uncorsetted, draped in colorful Indian shawls, hair "falling any way but the right way," but often went about in the Victorian world of white lawn with clothes, hands, and face "stained with chemicals from the photography (and smelling of them too)" (qtd in Hinton 35). On occasion, she was even observed "taking her cup of tea with her to the station, and stirring it on the way" (qtd in Gernsheim 15).

According to her great-niece, Virginia Woolf, Cameron's rather unrestrained appearance provided a perfect external correlative to her manner of speaking: for, in the words of Woolf, "so odd and bold were her methods of conversation," and so "caustic and candid of tongue" was she, that "there were visitors who found her company agitating" (17). Cameron's highly dramatic, openly emotional nature, together with the bustle and clutter of Dimbola Lodge (especially when photographs were being produced and strange figures were seen to wander, donning wings or dressed as prophets or kings), gave a young Annie Thackeray Ritchie the feeling that she was backstage at a theatre: "Indeed, we all seemed to be performing parts in some fanciful pageant, making believe, and yet





thoroughly earnest as children at their play” (*Reminiscences* 14). To Mr. Wilfred Ward, Mrs. Cameron was not only a dazzling actress, draped in red velvet, but “was stage manager of what was, for us young people, a great drama” (qtd in Hinton 33).

Obviously, in her private “life,” Julia was quite far from being a “proper lady”--at least in the Victorian sense of the word. Yet, to return once again to my previous line of interrogation: why the continued reference to Cameron as “Mrs. Cameron” and the “lady”? As I have previously noted in the case of Lewis Carroll, for example, these appellations may, in large part, be related to the fact that many of her male contemporaries wished to undermine her skills and enforce a reading of woman and artist as inferior, incompetent, and thus unthreatening. For, as Julia Swindells observes, “[t]he nineteenth-century history of the professions is largely about safeguarding careers for gentlemen, and defining and redefining . . . structures of work in relation to male power” (qtd in Corbett 61). But, however persuasive, such an explanation does not leave room to consider the possibility of Cameron’s own deliberate participation in the creative process--in this case the process of “self-creation”--and, thus, tends to reiterate that stereotypical depiction of Cameron as the naive lady amateur.

Therefore, in an effort both to counter those critics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who have tended to negate or ignore any sense of agency on Cameron’s part (especially in their condemnation of her deliberately “soft” photos as the result of a woman’s lack of control over the processes involved in photo-taking), and to render even more explicit the subversive and transgressive tendencies I have found in Cameron’s life and art, I will suggest that if Cameron was viewed as the ideal image of femininity by the Victorian (re)viewing public, despite her eccentricities, it was because she exerted a great



amount of deliberate effort in order to *appear* so. More specifically, I will offer that “Mrs.” Cameron was an astute business woman, conscious not only of the limitations which her status as a woman, wife and mother in Victorian Britain placed upon her, but of how potentially threatening to prevailing conceptualizations of feminine propriety and to patriarchal authority her more ambitious designs to usurp the “masculine” role as a producer, rather than mere object of, professional art photographs could be considered. Thus, even though she privately revealed a distinct resistance to particular standards and conventions of artistic production, and greater desires for herself and her art than would be considered proper of the “lady amateur,” I believe that Cameron knew that if she was to achieve for herself and her work the kind of critical acclaim and financial reward enjoyed by her male contemporaries, she would have to, at the very least, outwardly *appear* to adhere to the dominant codes of behavior assigned to her as a bourgeois woman. In short, Julia Margaret Cameron was not only a performer, in the sense that she loved amateur theatre and lived her life dramatically. Rather, as a woman in the nineteenth century with “lofty ambitions” to become a serious yet popular and successful practitioner of fine-art photography, Cameron felt compelled to take part in what we might now recognize as a form of the “womanliness masquerade,” through the creation of a public persona that complied with Victorian codes of ideal bourgeois femininity.<sup>8</sup>

Prominent theorist of feminism and the gaze, Mary Ann Doane, writes that “to masquerade is [in part] to create a gap in the form of a lack between one’s self and one’s

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<sup>8</sup> As Angela Leighton points out in the “Introduction II” section of *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, the concept of the masquerade is crucial to understanding many Victorian women artists’ lives and works. According to Leighton, the image of the mask is a recurrent one in Victorian women’s poetry that “hints at the difficulties women encountered in identifying themselves as poets in a society which, on the one hand, cast them in an unremittingly sentimental mould, and, on the other had, was astonished at their mere existence” (xxxvi).



image” (33). In light of such a suggestion, perhaps the clearest evidence of Cameron’s awareness of, and participation in, a “masquerade of ideal femininity” may be found in her 1873 unfinished autobiography, “Annals of My Glass House.” It is here, at the moment of self-authorship *par excellence* that I perceive a concerted effort to be exerted on Cameron’s part in the creation and circulation of a socially acceptable image of herself and her work (a kind of literary self-portrait of the artist, taken “deliberately out-of-focus”), so as to outwardly appear to comply with the fundamental tenets of the Victorian “Cult of Ideal Femininity,” even as she simultaneously stepped outside the passive, domestic role she was assigned by Victorian gender convention, in order to photograph, to write, and even to live the aesthetic lifestyle, and walk about freely, “body uncorsetted,” hair “falling every which way but the right way.” But before I undertake such an analysis of Cameron’s “Annals,” a brief summary of Joan Rivière’s now famous essay “Womanliness as Masquerade” (1929) is worth including here, both to elucidate my sense of Cameron as a participant in the “masquerade of femininity,” and to render more explicit what I mean by my use of such a term. Also of particular interest to this discussion will be Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s text, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, as it extends Rivière’s concept of the masquerade to an analysis of the Victorian woman writer, and provides a set of reading strategies for the contemporary reader to recognize a literary manifestation of the “womanliness masquerade” as an act which involves the simultaneous evocation and subversion of standard masculine styles and forms of writing.

Setting the stage for later theorists of gender like Judith Butler who have sought to expose, or unmask, as it were, the gendered economy of power and desire responsible for designating and governing the role, place, and perception of men as powerful, active





agents of culture (what Laura Mulvey calls “makers of meaning”), and of women as the dependent, passive objects within the private sphere (as “bearers of meaning”), Rivière conceptualizes femininity not as a universal, ahistorical essential biology rooted in the body, but, rather, as an elaborate, yet potentially mutable, social construction which she calls the “masquerade of womanliness.” Rivière explains:

Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if [a woman] was found to possess it--much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between womanliness and the “masquerade.” My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing (qtd in Doane 34).

For Rivière, femininity is both fundamentally a play of masks, and a conceptual form of disguise that the female “wearer” dons so that she may move beyond her socially prescribed role within the “active/male,” “passive/female” patriarchal structuring of gender relations, while still appearing to be in complete compliance with the system she defies. In her most famous case study, Rivière observes a female academic lecturing quite impressively before a predominantly male audience. At the end of the lecture, the woman is seen flirting girlishly with her male peers in the front row. In her own summarization of Rivière’s masquerade thesis, Mary Ann Doane calls this behaviour a presentation of “an excess of femininity,” in which the woman “becomes the very image of femininity in order to compensate for her ‘lapse’ into subjectivity” as she takes on the position of the “subject of speech (as a lecturer, as an intellectual woman with a certain amount of power)”--or, I would add, as the subject of the gaze as an artist or art photographer (33). In effect, the woman plays into and plays up prescribed notions of femininity so as to “compensate for a



perceived lack which may be received in her acquisition of a male subject position of authority” (34).

During the reign of Queen Victoria, ideal femininity was, of course, prescriptively defined as passive, domestic, and reproductive. As such, those women in the Victorian era who, out of choice or necessity, decided to take up the pen, the paint brush, or, in the case of Julia Margaret Cameron, the “Pre-Raphaelite camera,” and who sought to participate openly with any amount of seriousness in the public business of artistic production, not only faced a great deal of internal pressure in the form of a female “anxiety of authorship,” but were also met with the potential threat of public alienation or cultural stigmatization as “mad and monstrous.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar adroitly point out in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, with such rigid restrictions being placed upon virtually every aspect of women’s participation in artistic production, there were only a limited number of options or strategies of resistance available to artistic women who, like Julia Margaret Cameron, sought to move beyond the patriarchal definition of woman’s “natural” role, or subvert patriarchal aesthetic and artistic conventions, but who wished to do so without damaging their social reputations in such a way as to impede their public acceptance, as well as their potential for financial or cultural success. Aside from suppressing her artistic work entirely, the writing woman, for

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<sup>9</sup> That is not to say, of course, that women’s participation in the arts was completely prevented. While the Victorian social construction of femininity dictated that woman’s place was reproductive and passive, rather than creatively productive, emerging bourgeois codes of propriety promoted certain kinds of creative endeavours for women. For example, pastimes such as embroidery, watercolour painting, and even amateur photography were deemed appropriate for women, and were often considered quite central to a woman’s definition as a refined “lady.” However, the number of artistic media, materials, and subject matter deemed appropriate for women were rigidly restricted. Above all, a woman’s pursuit of art was acceptable only as long as it was practiced as an amateur pastime, coming secondary to her other maternal and wifely duties in the home. For a more detailed discussion of the centrality of women’s creativity to bourgeois propriety, one should consult both Parker and Pollock’s book, *Old Mistresses*, and Deborah Cherry’s book, *Painting Women*.



example, could “publish [her work] pseudonymously or anonymously,” thereby negating any links between herself and her art, or she could bow to cultural constraint by “modestly confess[ing] her female ‘limitations’ and concentrat[ing] on the ‘lesser’ subjects reserved for ladies as becoming to their inferior power” (64). As Gilbert and Gubar point out, however, such manoeuvres not only provided their users with limited power, but often, only further exacerbated the female artist’s feelings of anxiety and “schizophrenia.”

The more successful women (among whose ranks I wish to count Julia Margaret Cameron) “managed the difficult task of achieving true female literary authority” by “simultaneously conforming to and subverting patriarchal literary standards” (73). That is, rather than choosing to suppress their gender, or their identities, or both, through the use of a *nom de plume*, for example, these women performed the “masquerade of femininity,” by “publicly presenting acceptable façades for private and dangerous visions . . . to obscure but not obliterate their most subversive impulses” (74).

For some writers, gaining social acceptance meant disguising not only their own transgressiveness as *women* who were also seeking to be serious *artists*, but also any potentially subversive content in their works. According to Gilbert and Gubar, this kind of literary masquerade was achieved through the creation of multi-layered or “palimpsestic” works “whose surface designs conceal[ed] or obscure[d] deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) meaning,” or through the implicit revision of male genres, which were then used by the women to “record their own dreams and their own stories *in disguise*” (emphasis my own) (73). As a result, Gilbert and Gubar suggest that, to the contemporary reader, the “writing of these women often seems ‘odd’ in relation to the predominantly male literary history defined by the standards of . . . patriarchal poetics” and





“do not [quite] seem to ‘fit’ into any of those categories to which our literary historians have accustomed us” (74).

It is perhaps no surprise, and, as I will now argue, certainly no accident resulting from any female “incompetency,” that the autobiography of the woman whom critics and contemporaries found “eccentric” and full of “unexpected contradictions” is similarly contradictory, and somewhat “odd” in its style and form. I am not the only one to have found Cameron’s “Annals” an odd, and somewhat tricky piece of work. In her book on Cameron, *Annals of My Glass House*, Violet Hamilton calls the “Annals” “stylistically erratic,” and “. . . a difficult manuscript to interpret because the core issues are suggested rather than developed [and] the phrases are full of innuendo as opposed to statements, as opposed to fact” (18). It is precisely this “ambiguous” quality which I will suggest signals an underhanded resistance on Cameron’s part to Victorian gender ideology, and which may indicate her participation in a literary as well as cultural “masquerade of womanliness.”

The first and perhaps most obvious contradiction (at least to a Victorian reading audience) that deserves our critical attention is the noticeable gap between the genre of the text and the gender of its author. According to Mary Jean Corbett in her study, *Representing Femininity*, in the nineteenth century, autobiography was considered to be a highly *public* and therefore primarily *masculine* form of discourse in which men of merit (literary or otherwise) usually wrote of their lives and personal accomplishments within the public sphere, for wider popular circulation and consumption. Meanwhile, the cultural construction of women set forth by the Victorian “Cult of True Womanhood” precluded any such autobiographical address insofar as the respectable bourgeois woman’s place was



in the home, as the passive, private domestic care-giver, and such “*quotidienne*” activities were not considered worthy of public praise.<sup>10</sup>

Why, then, would a woman like Julia Margaret Cameron deliberately choose such a lofty form within which to record her life and her artistic career in “Annals of My Glass House”? Moreover, *how* did she do so? What was her chosen method of avoiding social stigmatization? A significant part of the answer to the question of *why* may relate to the fact that autobiography was, in both style and tone, a genre which afforded its users a certain amount of cultural authority. Keeping in mind Gilbert and Gubar’s list of suitable strategies available to the ambitious woman writer, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Cameron’s use of the autobiographical form was a deliberate and conscious one, as part of a greater concerted effort to gain consideration as a serious artist, and to achieve for herself “even one single grain of the momentous mountain heap of profits” and esteem afforded her male contemporaries, very much after the manner that women such as George Sand or George Eliot, for example, donned the garb of the male gentleman or the masculine literary pseudonym and narrative voice as attempts to enjoy the power and freedom afforded Victorian men. The following quotation, taken from a letter written to Sir John Herschel, lends further support to one such reading of Cameron. For, in this particular passage, Cameron demonstrates, with surprising alacrity, both her awareness of the powerful authority assigned to her male contemporaries by Victorian society’s uneven

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to point out that, although autobiography was socially constructed as a “masculine” discourse, both due to its content, and due to the fact that autobiographical writing involved a process of conspicuous self-promotion and self-projection which was considered anti-thetical to prevailing assumptions about femininity, many women did indeed write in this mode. However, as Mary Jean Corbett suggests in *Representing Femininity*, women who wished to use the autobiographical form had to employ a great deal of strategy in order to avoid the “risks” associated with transgressing Victorian codes of propriety: “For middle-class autobiographers . . . the ‘public discourse’ of autobiography [had] to be negotiated, at least in part, by and through the representation of the



gender economy, and her need to appropriate it in order to gain success, when she asks for Herschel's autograph on a photograph she took of him, as a method of boosting the sales of her photos: "... your name would justly add enormously to my reputation and thus greatly quicken the sale of my photographs--which is for me most needful now" (qtd in Hamilton 28). In her "Annals," Cameron reveals a similar awareness of the cultural potency assigned not only to men, but to certain "objective," "rational," and traditionally "masculine" forms and styles of writing over more feminine, "gushing" ones. She signals such awareness through her inclusion of a Tennysonian intertext, and, towards the end of the first paragraph, through her self-conscious declaration that she feels "confident that the truthful account of indefatigable work . . . will add in some measure to [her autobiography's] value" (qtd in Weaver 154).

Clearly, Julia Margaret Cameron recognized the power ascribed to the masculine position in Victorian society. But if Cameron saw the necessity of usurping male authority, she must certainly have recognized the restrictions placed on women such as herself by the rigid Victorian economy of gender--an economy which defined her role as passive object and not active subject. In other words, she would also have been aware of the potential anxiety that her open and deliberate use of the autobiographical form, and her appropriation of a masculinised subject position could provoke. Because her desire for popular acceptance and material success was as great as, if not greater than, her desire to subvert Victorian conventions of gender and photography, she knew she could not afford to deliberately flaunt her transgressiveness as George Sand and others did.

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private sphere" or by and through the evocation of certain "inferior" genres of writing associated with women, such as the diary or the memoir (11). Such appears to be the case with Cameron in her "Annals."





To return to the second question: *how*, then, did Cameron “enter into a discourse from which [she was], in ideological terms, supposed to be excluded”? (Corbett 10).

Mary Jean Corbett suggests that for most “middle-class women autobiographers, the only way to write and still maintain respectability in the public domain, was to negotiate the ‘public discourse’ of autobiography . . . at least in part, by and through the representation of the private sphere,” and by and through the evocation of more traditionally “feminine” genres such as the memoir, to be used as a kind of elaborate outer garb of feminine complicity with which to cover over the literary “rational dress” of public autobiography.

Potential textual evidence of Cameron’s active participation in this very sort of literary, as well as cultural, performance of “excessive femininity” as a method of “making it in a man’s world” abounds in her written “Annals”--the most obvious example being found in the work’s title itself: “Annals of My Glass House.” Although clearly appropriating the masculine form of the public autobiography in order to celebrate and promote her life and photographic works and, by extension, a subject position which has been culturally defined as masculine (an act of appropriation which is signalled by her use of the first-person possessive pronoun “my” in the work’s title), Cameron strategically advertises her work as her “annals” and, later, in the text, her “anecdotal little history”--terms which, as indicated by Corbett, would seem much more evocative of the “feminine” (and therefore supposedly “inferior”) tradition of the memoir.

A similar act of seeming feminine ineptitude is performed through Cameron’s writing style. In the first paragraph, after having revealed her knowledge that a regulated, detached style of writing “would add some measure to [her work’s] value,” and having exhibited her ability to write in such a manner as to avoid “details strictly personal and



touching the affections,” she declares emphatically that “it is [only] with great difficulty that I restrain my overflow of heart” (qtd in Weaver 155). What follows is an apparent “lapse into subjectivity”--to use Mary Ann Doane’s expression--as Cameron proceeds to wax poetic on the very same subjects she claims to know to avoid, thus reinforcing pre-existing cultural constructions of the female writer as an uncontrolled, emotional “improvisatrice” who is not talented or intelligent enough to appear as a serious threat to the professional male writer.

The infantile and dependent image which Cameron constructs of herself in “Annals” seems to further endorse a reading of her writing strategy as a deliberate performance of “excessive femininity.” While privately railing against her victimization at the hands of critics who “called and condemn’d” her work “out-of-focus” and amateurish in letters to Sir John Herschel, in “Annals of My Glass House,” she gives herself to be seen playing the part of the bumbling female incompetent. Careful to affirm her own status as a “lady” and an “amateur,” “Mrs.” Cameron overplays the “accidental” and “flukish” nature of her work, remarking upon her “habit of running into the dining room with my wet pictures,” a habit that resulted in the staining of “an immense quantity of table linen with nitrate of silver, indelible stains,” and one that she exclaims with certainty “should have banished [her] from any less indulgent household” (155-6).

A similar and particularly common tendency of Cameron’s that has been noted elsewhere by her biographers, and which manifests itself in her writing, is her (re)assertion of her reverence for, and dependency upon, her husband and her male contemporaries for their encouragement, support, and inspiration, while consistently downplaying or effacing her own abilities. Although Cameron was clearly proud of her successes and took several



opportunities to advertise any praise or awards she received for her art photos, she was careful to temper her elation with an exaggerated amount of humility in public.<sup>11</sup> In “Annals of My Glass House,” Cameron thus speaks of Sir Henry Taylor as her “great Master,” “Teacher and High Priest [who] [f]rom my earliest childhood I had loved and honoured . . .” (157). She calls the painter G. F. Watts “Il Signor” as a sign of reverence. Most telling is her explicit comparison between her own work and that of a “superior” male contemporary named Mayall: “Meanwhile I took another immortal head, that of Alfred Tennyson. . . . The Laureate has since said of it that he likes it better than any photograph that has been taken of him except one by Mayall; that ‘except’ speaks for itself. The comparison seems too comical. It is rather like comparing one of Madame Tussaud’s waxwork heads to one of Woolner’s ideal heroic busts” (qtd in Weaver 157).

The following quotation not only illuminates Cameron’s feigned dependency on male approval, but, on a deeper level, it reveals her own sense of herself as self-consciously playing a role. In this particular passage, she explicitly configures herself as a performer and her husband as the audience to which she bows: “My husband from first to last has watched every picture with delight, and it is my daily habit to run to him with every glass upon which a fresh glory is newly stamped, and to listen to his enthusiastic applause” (qtd in Weaver 155-56). Cameron further reveals her sense of herself (as a middle-class woman and as an artist) as a highly visible social performer when, in the opening paragraph of the “Annals,” she likens her photography to a child or a debutante

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<sup>11</sup> That Cameron was privately quite happy with her successes and had a great deal of faith in her own abilities is evident in a letter written to her sister, Adeline Vaughn, 15 November 1875, wherein she states “I have no pride. I have a great deal of confidence in myself & my fellow creatures & if they disappoint me I am more sorry for their sakes than my own” (qtd in Weaver, 27).





who, in preparation for her first “coming out,” must be appropriately “clothed with light as with a garment” to be received into high social circles.

With her art photographs, Julia Margaret Cameron attempted to blur the lines dividing art and photography. In life, she sought to break down the cultural positioning of “woman” and “artist” as antithetical by seeking a ten-year career as a serious and successful art photographer. But in her public autobiography, she downplays these more radical endeavours by re-asserting a rhetorical link between domesticity and photography.<sup>12</sup> In the opening of “Annals of My Glass House,” for example, Cameron makes an explicit analogy between maternal reproduction and artistic production by likening her photography to a child that “now ten years old, has passed the age of lisping and stammering and may speak for itself . . .” (154). And again, a few paragraphs later, she speaks of her camera, a gift from her daughter Julia in 1863, with such affection as a mother might bestow on her first-born child: “[F]rom the first moment I handled my lens with a tender ardour, and it has become to me as a living thing, with voice and memory and creative vigour” (154).

The process of “domestication” which Cameron attempts to undertake figuratively in her rhetorical construction of photography as an extension of “woman’s work” (maternal reproduction) within the domestic sphere is literalized in her descriptions of the transformation of several sections of the family estate into a home studio: “I turned my coal-house into a dark room, and a glazed fowl-house I had given to my children became

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<sup>12</sup> It may be noted, though, that Cameron had perhaps less “work” to do in asserting a link between photography and domesticity than, say, women painters. For, there were (and continue to be) a great many cultural links being made between photography and the domestic sphere. For example, Pierre Bourdieu points out the centrality of the photo album and the family portrait in the creation of a sense of cohesion within the Western “cult of domesticity,” in his text *On Photography*. Similarly, Lindsay Smith notes that the etymological root of the term “focus” is “hearth” in her essay, “The Politics of Focus: Feminism and Photography Theory.”



my glass house. . . . [T]he society of hens and chickens was soon changed for that of poets, prophets, painters and lovely maidens, who all in turn have immortalized the humble little farm erection” (qtd in Weaver 155). Cameron’s inclusion of such a fact seems to endorse an image of her process of artistic production as one that is symbiotic with, but neatly subsumed within, the private sector. However, visitors to Dimbola at any time over the course of the ten years when Cameron pursued the photographic arts became acutely aware of the fact that, in reality, “photography had priority over household affairs” (Hinton 21). According to Helmut Gernsheim,

[t]he Cameron household soon had to adjust itself to the new pursuit of its mistress. The smell of collodion mingled with the scent of the sweet briar, copying-frames were spread on the lawn. . . . As the maids were occupied in acting as models or dark-room assistants, the guests had to answer the door, and were often kept waiting a long time for lunch. (Gernsheim 22)

Domestic affairs were in a particular state of disarray while Cameron was occupied shooting a series of photographic illustrations for Tennyson’s poetry anthology, “Idylls of the King,” as household items and household inhabitants were all surrendered for the cause of photography. Annie Thackeray records her memories of the Cameron household during production time:

I cannot tell you how much we enjoy it all; of a morning the sun comes blazing so cheerfully, and the sea sparkles, and there is a far-away hill all green, and a cottage which takes one’s breath it looks so pretty in the morning mists. Then comes eggs and bacon. Then we go to the down top. Then we lunch off eggs and bacon. Then we have tea and look out the window, then we pay little visits, then we dine off eggs and bacon, and of an evening Minny and Emmy, robed in picturesque shawls, sit by the fire, and Miss Stephen and I stroll about in the moonlight (qtd in Mavor 46).

Cameron herself seemed to render even more explicit than Gernsheim the often antagonistic relationship between domesticity and artistic production in an inscription written in one of her albums, given as a gift to a friend: “Fatal to photographs are cups of



tea and coffee, candles and lamps, and children's fingers!" (qtd in Hinton 33). However, in her public "Annals," it is this very sort of antagonism that Cameron's work seems particularly careful to disavow, in order that she may put forth an image of herself and her art as conservative of prevailing conceptualizations of art and femininity.

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I wish to close this chapter by undertaking a very brief examination of a photograph, taken not *by*, but *of* Julia Margaret Cameron in 1858, by Lewis Carroll (**Fig. 1**). This photograph is of particular use to this discussion in part because it renders more explicit the economies of power and gender within which I have previously suggested Cameron found herself enmeshed as both an artist of prominence, and as a woman in the Victorian era. However, when analyzed in conjunction with another photograph taken by Cameron's son, Charles (**Fig. 2**), it also lends further visual evidence of Cameron's use of a "womanliness masquerade" to both resist and conform to cultural codes of ideal bourgeois femininity. At first glance, the Carroll photograph seems to fit neatly into the category of the traditional family portrait, so often found gracing the walls of the bourgeois Victorian home. Mrs. Cameron models as a mother, dressed in upper middle-class finery, hair neatly arranged after the fashion of that most famous Victorian mother, Queen Victoria. Apparently, she has been gathered by the photographer and bade to submit to his commands to sit with her children in a *tableau* of idyllic domesticity. Both the style of her clothing and the posturing of Cameron's head (tilted slightly downward), are meant to express the woman's modesty, humility, and apparent servitude, while the presence of her children further serve to visually encode Julia Margaret Cameron as the model of ideal Victorian femininity within the photograph.





Upon closer analysis, however, the viewer uncovers several details in the frame which disrupt the standard photographer/subject, photographed/object distinction that governed the standard practice of portrait photography, and which thus undermine any easy categorization of this photograph as a “conventional” portrait, portraying a typically feminine bourgeois woman and her children. Of particular note is the rather unconventional posing exhibited in this photograph. If this is intended to be one of those carefully posed studio portraits, the children do not appear to be particularly co-operative or disciplined. The younger, presumably Henry, kneels at the side of his mother, lip slightly protruding in a childish sulk, looking ready to hide behind his mother’s skirts to escape the tedium of sitting for the photo. The elder, Charles, seems pre-occupied by something off-set and turns his gaze to concentrate on the object of greater interest. Only Cameron looks ahead, towards the camera (the import of which, I will return to momentarily). The photograph also reveals a greater proximity of bodies, and a more open expression of affection between those bodies, than was normally observed in the conventional studio portrait, or, indeed, in Victorian public generally. Here, Henry clings to his mother’s side, while Charles holds tightly to his mother’s hand. Juxtaposed with the visual signs of passive obedience and maternity, is the suggestion of the woman’s activity and agency, which is expressed through Cameron’s straight-forward look, as well as the fountain pen, poised for action in her left hand.

A series of provocative tensions are thus visually encoded into the picture, the origins of which the contemporary viewer is left to ponder, as several questions of “intention” arise: what are the respective contributions of the photographer, and of the model in the construction of this photograph? Who decided that Cameron be dressed and



then posed with her children in such a way? Cameron? Carroll? Both? Did Cameron insist on being portrayed in the act of writing? Did she break the pose, resist submitting to the camera (and Carroll's) objectifying gaze, by returning the camera-man's look at the last minute?<sup>13</sup>

Little to no definite information exists about the Carroll photograph, by whom it was commissioned, or for what purposes. However, if we compare the image with another more intimate, and decidedly personal portrait of Cameron, taken in 1870, by her son, Charles (**Fig. 2**), it seems likely that Carroll's photograph was a more carefully orchestrated image, created for public consumption (or at least open display), after the manner of the popular *carte-de-visite* photographs of the day, or, more specifically, after the manner of Cameron's self-representation in her public "Annals." Charles' image of Cameron, on the other hand, seems to render visually the more private and unrestrained Julia observed by family friends and neighbours, garbed in Indian shawls, "hair falling any way but the right way."

In keeping with my desire to read agency in Cameron's life and work, I wish to suggest that we may also view the Carroll photograph as a metaphor of the Victorian gendered visual economy, and Cameron's struggle within it to publically appear at once learned and capable and, yet, obedient and non-threatening. Within this metaphorical reading, the male photographer's look (of which the photograph is the palpable result) represents the patriarchal gaze placed on Cameron as both woman and high-profile artist.

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<sup>13</sup> It is at this moment that I wish to remind the reader of the tenuous nature of the readings of have herein provided, of the photographs of Cameron, as well as those pictures taken by Cameron. As I have noted in the introduction, and as Jay Ruby points out in his book *Secure the Shadow: Death and Photography in America*, "[i]ntentionality is always difficult to determine when contemplating a photograph or any other mediated communicative form in which the sender and receiver are separated by time and space (Worth and Gross 1981)." Thus, "[o]ne is forced



Supposing he successfully coerced Cameron into appearing in the picture as the image of ideal femininity, Carroll would also seem to represent--on a more localized level--those men who sought to depict Cameron as the passive, female amateur, for the sake of defusing her potential to threaten or compete with them. Cameron's mere presence in the photograph, together with conventional feminine garb and submissive pose, would seem to represent her apparent acceptance of her object status within the visual economy, or, perhaps, her knowledge of her need to give herself up to be looked at as an object. By contrast, Cameron's defiant look back at the photographer and spectator suggests both the woman photographer's knowledge of, and her subtle (but defiant) resistance to, her status as feminine object. In this way, the Carroll photograph may provide an interesting visual example of Cameron's participation in that cultural performance known as the "masquerade of womanliness," and strengthens the claim that Julia Margaret Cameron was not an exclusively passive, "feminine" artist, nor did she always "take" well to being on the other side of the camera.

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[as I do here] to conjecture about whose intention you are looking at in a commercially produced photograph--the sitter's or photographer's?" (63).





## CHAPTER 2

### “A DREAM OF FAIR WOMEN”: Julia Margaret Cameron(’s) ‘Take(s)’ on the Pre-Raphaelite Cult of Feminine Beauty

“There remains something that cannot be silenced, that fills you with an unruly desire to know what her name was, the woman who was alive there, who even now is still real and will never consent to be wholly absorbed in art”

*Walter Benjamin*  
(qtd in Iverson, 453).

“Herein we have eyes so full of fervent love . . . A mouth where silence seems to gather strength / From lips so gently closed, that almost say, / ‘Ask not my story, lest you hear at length / Of sorrows where sweet hope has lost its way . . .”

*Julia Margaret Cameron*  
(from her poem, “On a Portrait.”)

In her now famous essay on women, film, and the gendered gaze, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey asserts that “[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance,” and wherein “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female,” “woman functions as signifier for the male other.” She is thus “tied to her place as bearer of meaning[,] not maker of meaning and [to] her role as object not subject of the look” as “[t]he determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (19). It would appear that, within a Victorian visual economy that designated the subject of the gaze as masculine, Julia Margaret Cameron’s desire to “look” through the phallic lens of the camera as a serious fine-art photographer, was, so to speak, a desire to “look” like a man. Indeed, as I have argued in the previous chapter, Julia Margaret Cameron did take up, with a great deal of seriousness, two roles which, in the nineteenth century, were considered “masculine”--the roles of the



spectatorial subject through photography, and the masculine authorial subject through the act of writing public autobiography. As I have further suggested, this was a fact of which she was acutely aware, and which must have motivated her to take part in a “masquerade of excessive femininity” as a method of downplaying or “masking” her transgressive behaviour, in order to avoid social stigmatization.

But it is one thing to state that Julia Margaret Cameron occupied a position which was defined as masculine, as a producer of culture through art photography. It is quite another to suggest that her art photographs are the product of a masculine “look” at the female subjects of her fancy photos and posed art *tableaux*, and, thus concomitantly, of a sexist economy of desire and power, which Laura Mulvey, and other recent theorists of a gendered gaze, suggest that such a “look” entails. Therefore, it is the central focus of this second chapter to reconsider and problematize my previous assertion that, in performing the “masquerade of womanliness,” Cameron sought to appropriate and replicate the masculine “look.” Through a more careful analysis of Cameron’s art photographs of “Fair Women”--an abundant but surprisingly neglected section of her work--and her poem “On a Portrait,” I hope to assess Cameron’s contribution to--and her reactions against--a Victorian cultural discourse on femininity, and, most particularly, her response to the tendencies within the theory and practice of art in the Victorian age to reduce real women to that silent, static object of masculine scopic desire, “Woman.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The distinction “women” and “Woman” has been borrowed from Teresa de Lauretis’ seminal work *Technologies of Gender* (the capitalization of “Woman” being my own addition to de Lauretis’ distinction, as a method of further emphasizing the difference between the two categories). De Lauretis explains: “By ‘woman’ I mean a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures (critical and scientific, literary or juridical discourses), which works as both their vanishing point and their specific condition of



In their book, *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*, Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn divide the Pre-Raphaelite Movement into three generational waves, spanning the Victorian period from 1848 to 1910. Of particular interest to this discussion is the Second Generation (1865-80), to which Marsh and Gerrish Nunn refer as the “Rossettian” sect of Pre-Raphaelitism, so named after the movement’s most conspicuous and prolific member during this time: Dante Gabriel Rossetti. According to Marsh and Gerrish Nunn, after the dissolution of the original Brotherhood around 1853, Rossetti took the helm of the *avant-garde coterie* and Pre-Raphaelitism’s aesthetic objectives soon shifted away from nature transcribed in greatest detail (after the teachings of the great Victorian art critic John Ruskin) towards a new central focus: feminine beauty. Women became such a central element to the work produced by the Second Generation Pre-Raphaelite artists that, in the twentieth century, the term “Pre-Raphaelite” still “can refer not to a style or period of painting, but to a specific feminine look” (6).

Much critical consideration has been devoted to examining the strategies of gender representation in the works of the Second Wave Pre-Raphaelites such as Rossetti and William Morris. One reading to have emerged from such considerations has been that the Pre-Raphaelites not only transgressed Victorian aesthetic codes through their *avant-garde* painting techniques, but that they to a large extent also subverted Victorian notions of heterosexual married love, and of women as passionless “Angels in the House,” through their visual presentations of women as “Pre-Raphaelite stunners” with long, loose hair, generous and over-exaggerated lips and eyes, and sensual facial expressions, suggestive of

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existence. By ‘women,’ on the other hand, I will mean the real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain” (5).





profound longing. However, the general consensus--at least within feminist art histories of Pre-Raphaelitism--seems to be that women, even models of transgressive sexuality such as Guinevere, the adulterous queen from Arthurian legend, are portrayed more as desirable *objects* than desiring *subjects* in Pre-Raphaelite art. For while Rossetti's women may appear to express desire, they are rarely depicted as subjects of the gaze. More often than not, they are represented with downcast eyes, their backs turned from the viewer, or their faces slightly tilted (**Fig. 3**). The status of "Woman" as "*objet de désir*" is reinforced by the ways in which the images are doubly contained by the actual picture frame and by the poetry often accompanying the art, which often provides another narrative frame through which to "read" the painting and the woman depicted therein (Pearce).

It has been further noted by Lynne Pearce in *Woman/Image/Text* that the majority of the women whom the Pre-Raphaelites chose to represent visually from various literary, theological, and historical texts, are quite often both Christian and secular models of female patience and virtue, such as the Virgin or Beatrice; these mythical women are most often depicted in scenes of captivity or utter helplessness that not only literalize the emotional confinement of these fictional characters, but that also comment rather ironically to the modern viewer on the historical, social, and political entrapment of the real women models posing for the images.

Considering that Julia Margaret Cameron not only often deliberately sought a decidedly "Pre-Raphaelite" look through the chosen styles and subjects of her pictures, (as in **Fig 4.**, entitled *Pre-Raphaelite Study*) but that, like Rossetti, she also took beauty--in particular, feminine beauty--as the central focus of her work, it is not unexpected that many critics have contended that Cameron's art photographs seem to problematically



reproduce the same tendency to typify and objectify women. Indeed, Cameron, in her own words, “loved all loveliness” and desired “to arrest all beauty that came before me” (qtd in Weaver 155). Further, as critics have continued to read Cameron as “a traditional bourgeois woman,” her art photographs of women have tended to be read as similarly celebratory of woman’s place as the “Angel in the House” within the Victorian ideology of divided spheres. An example of one such reading appears in Constance Relihan’s examination of Cameron’s 1874-75 illustrations of Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King and other Poems*, “Vivien, Elaine and the Model’s Gaze: Cameron’s Reading of *Idylls of the King*,” wherein Relihan argues that, like those snakey-limbed “stunners with bee-stung lips” in the paintings of Rossetti, “Cameron’s images . . . seem to create an ideal of the female that diminishes its sexual passion and power, transforming even Tennyson’s most vibrant women into either Victorian allegorical representations of female devotion and martyrdom, or into figures robbed of strength” (114).

Certainly, such contentions are not without support. Cameron’s tendency to typify people into allegorical subjects, and to use the faces and forms of young women to stand in as embodiments of abstract ideals--most often Beauty-- is apparent, not only in her photographs, as we will see, but also in her autobiography, wherein, for instance, she describes her memories of friends gathered near her Freshwater home on a lovely summer’s day: “[S]urely Poetry, Philosophy and Beauty were never more fitly represented than when Sir John Herschel, Henry Taylor and my own sister, Virginia Summers encircled round the little font of the Mortlake Church” (qtd in Weaver 157).

There are several of Cameron’s photographs which do indeed seem influenced by the Victorian conceptualization of ideal femininity as domestic, maternal, and passive, at



the same time as they certainly reinforced such a construction. Particularly in Cameron's early religious and typical photographs, the image of "Woman" is repeatedly configured as Mary or the Madonna with child (**Figs. 5, 6**). The photo *The Angel in the House* (**Fig. 7**), inspired by Coventry Patmore's poem of the same title, which was a tract celebrating domesticity and heterosexual married life for women in the nineteenth century, represents another attempt on Cameron's part to give women "wings" as ideal types, while *Dora as the Bride/Mrs. Ewan Hay Cameron* reads like an advertisement in a contemporary bridal periodical, emphasizing the appealing, stylish side of marriage, distilled in the image of the fashionably clad Victorian bride (**Fig. 8**). The prominent display of wedding rings on the hands of many of the subjects (whether portrait or art *tableaux*), after the fashion of the traditional engagement or wedding portrait (**Fig. 9**), also serves to reinscribe a narrative of matrimonial legitimacy into the photograph, and suggests that Cameron's stance towards woman's ordained destiny as wife and mother is one of endorsement and celebration, not critical rejection.

Nevertheless, even as she adhered quite closely to the Pre-Raphaelite movement's aesthetic principles and, often, to a conservative model of passive femininity for her artistic subjects, I hesitate to read either the images, or their creator, as faithful, unwavering supporters of the dominant constructions of bourgeois femininity set forth by the Victorian "Cult of True Womanhood" and in part reiterated by Pre-Raphaelitism. For, as in her life, there are several subtle ambiguities embedded within Cameron's art--both visual and textual--which serve to undercut, or--to use Judith Butler's term--to "trouble" any easy categorization of her photos as unproblematically "conservative" in their (re)presentations of femininity. These are ambiguities which critics such as Mike Weaver have attempted to





overlook in their desires to categorize both the woman and her work as strictly “feminine,” rather than “feminist,” but which I wish to propose deserve further investigation, as they may provide the basis for a valid late twentieth-century feminist re-(e)valuation of Cameron’s art photographs of women.

In the previous chapter, I attempted to counter the critical consensus that Julia Margaret Cameron was, in any simple sense, “a traditional bourgeois woman,” by revealing such a conceptualization to be the result of Cameron’s active part in the creation of a publically acceptable image of herself, through her participation in what Joan Rivière has called the “masquerade of womanliness.” I would now like to extend a similar reading to Cameron’s poem, “On a Portrait” (1875), and to several of her art photographs, by suggesting that both sets of texts possess palimpsestic or “odd” qualities which may signal the female author/artist/photographer’s attempt to textually “mask” her fiercely critical, but necessarily concealed, stance towards cultural convention--in this case, towards Victorian constructions of femininity, particularly as manifest in Pre-Raphaelite visual representations of women.

In order to elucidate my sense that Julia Margaret Cameron was privately quite critical of the Pre-Raphaelite “Cult of Feminine Beauty,” even as she appeared to occupy a place of privilege within the sacred circle of the Brotherhood, I will begin with a brief analysis of two poems, “In an Artist’s Studio,” by Christina Rossetti, and “The Lust of the Eyes,” by Elizabeth Siddal. Reading “On a Portrait” alongside Rossetti and Siddal’s subversive poetry will, I hope, make more clear the ways in which Cameron’s poem may be said to reveal her desires to subvert Pre-Raphaelite theories of art and gender representation “from within,” as Rossetti and Siddal were two favoured Pre-Raphaelite



models whose own poetic works are said to reveal a private but defiant resistance to, and discontent with, their treatment by Pre-Raphaelite artists.

In Christina Rossetti's well-known poem, "In an Artist's Studio," the speaker, a person outside the artist-model relationship, observes a series of paintings displayed around an artist's vacated workspace. I take the suggestion of critics that this poem is Rossetti's commentary on her brother, Pre-Raphaelite painter, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's obsessive relationship with his model, and later wife, Elizabeth Siddal. Thus, *she* seems disturbed by the fact that "[o]ne face looks out from all his canvasses, / One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans" (1-2)--a face he vampirically "feeds upon . . . by day and night" (6).<sup>15</sup> The male artist has transformed the female model from a real, living individual into various familiar character types ("A queen in opal or in ruby dress, / A . . . girl in freshest summer greens/ A saint, an angel"), each with the same "face" and "selfsame figure," but each remaining "nameless" (5-7). Clearly, there is a disparity between the woman with "true kind eyes. . . . found . . . hidden just behind those screens" (3) and the woman rendered in the paintings. Having etched his desire onto the blank "screen" or mirror that is her face, it would seem that the painter has translated the real female model into what Laura Mulvey calls "the silent image of woman." He has created an artistic interpretation of the woman "not as she is, but as she fills his dream" (14).

While Christina Rossetti has entered into the literary canon as a major poet of the Victorian Age, it is only in recent years that her sister-in-law, Elizabeth Siddal, has started to be considered a poetic *subject* in her own right. Previously, Elizabeth Siddal had, for

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<sup>15</sup> An example of this biographical reading of "In an Artist's Studio" appears in the introduction to Rossetti's poems appearing in *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, wherein Angela Leighton argues that "'In an Artist's Studio' .



the most part, been construed as simply the “*object de désir*,” silent model, and muse *par excellence* of the Pre-Raphaelite movement. However, thanks to the efforts of feminist art historians like Deborah Cherry and Griselda Pollock, we have moved beyond those uni-dimensional accounts and drawings by male contemporaries, which have tended to render the woman as little more than the beautiful, yet sickly face found haunting the canvases of Rossetti, Millais, and Hunt, to explore Siddal’s own views, not only of herself, but of her role within the Pre-Raphaelite movement, and in her relationship with Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Siddal’s poem, “The Lust of the Eyes,” provides a startlingly bitter and often harsh insight into both Siddal’s unhappiness with her treatment by her husband and lover Rossetti, and her own feelings about the tendencies of the other Brotherhood painters to take her, and women like her, as the epitome of female beauty. Using the first-person perspective of a male speaker ironically, Siddal critiques the mis/treatment of women at the hands of male artists who take women for muses and models, disregarding everything beyond the model’s appearance and her functional role as object. In the first lines of the poem, the speaker proclaims coldly: “I care not for my Lady’s soul / Though I worship before her smile; / I care not where be my Lady’s goal / When her beauty shall lose its wile” (1-4). With his piercing artist’s gaze, he looks (rather than sees) “through her wild eyes,” as if there is nothing behind or beyond the visible face he gazes upon, or as if she is a uni-dimensional or transparent spectre. The poem contains a common trope within Pre-Raphaelite literature and art, particularly in Rossetti’s creations: the close link between

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. . . is a touching tribute by [Christina] . . . to the new star [Elizabeth Siddal], whose beauty ambiguously feeds the artist’s ravaging addiction” (354).





death and eroticism.<sup>16</sup> Even in (or perhaps because of) death, the lady cannot escape the objectifying gaze: the artist appears more concerned with how the body will be displayed, wondering anxiously “who shall close my Lady’s eyes / And who shall fold her hands?” (13-14). It is clear, in his asking, “Will any hearken if she cries?” (15), that the speaker is deaf to her voice and, therefore, to her subjectivity.

If, in style and content, Julia Margaret Cameron’s photographs may be said to exhibit the overwhelming influence of the male Pre-Raphaelite painters and the “Rossettian Cult of Feminine Beauty,” the theme of her lesser-known poem “On a Portrait” bears a closer resemblance to the works of Siddal and Rossetti, the silently resistant Pre-Raphaelite “Sisters.” At first, the speaker in Cameron’s poem, “On a Portrait,” seems, like Siddal’s narrator, more closely aligned with the male gaze of the artist or art critic. In the first stanza, the speaker extols female beauty and the “mighty influence” of the seductive “secret, swift, and subtle” spell that women have the power to exert over men, very much in the way Vivien is depicted casting her spell over Merlin in Cameron’s photo (**Fig. 21**). In the tradition of Petrarchan blazon, the speaker breaks the woman down into various constituent parts: “Here we have eyes so full of fervent love” (5); “[a] mouth where silence seems to gather strength” (9); “the head . . . borne so proudly high, / the soft round cheek” (13-14). However, juxtaposed with the external descriptions of her highborne head, and her cheek “splendid in its bloom,” are the suggestions of the churnings of an inward existence: “True courage rises thro’ the brilliant eye, / And great

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<sup>16</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the links between death and desire in Pre-Raphaelite art, as viewed through a psychoanalytic frame, Elizabeth Bronfen’s text, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*, is worth consulting.



resolve comes flashing thro' the gloom" (15-16). The woman is not merely a pretty face, but a figure with strength and pride.

Mary Ann Doane argues that "for the female spectator there is a certain over-presence of the image--she is the image. . .[as] woman's experiences make it virtually impossible for her to preserve a distance from her body or adopt the position of a fetishist" (224). There appears to be an inferred alliance between the speaker and the image of the woman present in the poem which, in the context of Doane's discussion of a gendered gaze based on a model of proximity and distance, suggests to me that the speaker is a female spectator/narrator. The speaker in "On a Portrait" seems much more attentive to "the Lady's soul," for which the artist in Siddal's poem says he "care[s] not." Cameron's narrator/observer is constantly aware of the woman's silence. At the end of the first stanza, she asks, "[w]herein the music of thy voice doth lie?" (4). The speaker then remarks upon the mouth of the image in stanza three, noting it looks as though the woman is poised to speak: ". . . silence seems to gather strength / From lips so gently closed" (9-10). What I find most remarkable is the speaker's desire to refrain from attempting a definitive reading of the painting before her, which is persistently reinforced through the use of conditional verbal and adverbial forms: "one *could almost* prove / That Earth had loved her favourite over much" (7), and in the following stanza, "lips [are] so gently closed that *almost* say . . ." (10) (emphasis my own). The speaker thus resists reading the woman merely as a fetishized object of desire, as the male painter did in his creation of the image. And, importantly, while the woman in the picture lacks a voice, the speaker does not presume to talk for her.



It is clear from the final stanza that the portrait of the woman is the product of a male imagination, much as the painter in Christina Rossetti's poem created the woman "[n]ot as she is, but as she fills his dreams," for it is not nature which has formed her beauty, but "Genius and love [that] have each fulfilled their part" (21). Most notably, a particular standard of beauty ("all that we love best in classic art") is described in the final line as having been forcibly "stamped for ever on the immortal face" (24). Just as the living model is reduced to a type, a model of Woman, her beauty is reconfigured to conform to a cultural standard of Beauty. The female observer suggests an inadequacy on the part of the male artist to realize that "more than genius goes / To search the key-note of those melodies, / To find the depths of all those tragic woes" (20-1). Clearly then, the strength, pride and sorrow which the spectator has sensed about the portrait woman are not present in the painting, but are, rather, the result of her own tenuous yet sensitive attempt to imbue the subject with life and character, which the male artist has obviously failed to do. She begs the "noble painter" to do the woman's life as well as her beauty justice in his art, demanding that he "[t]une thy song right and paint rare harmonies" (20). Cameron's poem thus mounts a powerful--if subtle--critique against the kind of "representational violence" enacted in the tendencies of artists like Rossetti to "use the face" but neglect the inner strength and spirit of his female "subjects."<sup>17</sup>

As Nicole Cooley points out in her own analysis of Cameron's life and works, entitled "Recovering the 'Silent Image of Woman,'" in an autobiographical sense, it is

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<sup>17</sup> The term "representational violence" comes from Elizabeth Bronfen's book, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic*. Bronfen argues for the inherent violence "engendered by the move from a real body to a sign. . . . [in] diminishing the material physicality of the model in favour of an allegorical reading [of that model]," for "effaced in each case is the subjectivity of the . . . woman . . . her body and her pain" (49). In other words, Bronfen sees the transformation of a real, historical woman into that "fictional construct" discussed by Teresa de Lauretis, 'Woman,' as an inherently violent act.





perhaps rather puzzling that the woman in the poem is situated as an observer, rather than a producer, of paintings that are more faithful to the female subject and her inner existence. For while the woman in the poem only appeals to the male artist to “tune thy song right, and paint rare harmonies,” Cameron herself actively strove to reverse or, at the very least, *surpass* Pre-Raphaelite representations of women as merely objects of external beauty in her own artistic creations. When considered within the context of the last chapter’s discussion, however, the speaker’s appeal to the “noble painter,” after her previous critique of his artistic abilities, may be read as a further sign of Cameron’s own strategy of “stooping to conquer,” as Gerhard Joseph has termed it: that strategy of feigned humility and inferiority Cameron employed in order to accomplish her split desires to subvert aesthetic and gender convention, and still gain public success as an art photographer.

Although certainly prevalent in her written work, Cameron’s resistance to the Pre-Raphaelite tendency to render vigorous women into merely beautiful objects of masculine fetishistic desire is more explicitly expressed through her art photographs. A comparative analysis of several of Cameron’s photographs of “Fair Women” with exemplary Pre-Raphaelite paintings will reveal some of the ways in which Cameron played with aesthetic and photographic convention in order to figure the feminine differently.

While the Pre-Raphaelites concerned themselves primarily with the outward beauty of their female sitters, Julia Margaret Cameron expressed again and again, in letters and diary entries, her desire to capture what she called the “inner complexions” of her models. As the photographic medium was unable to capture one’s inner workings in the way that it could faithfully record one’s external being, however, Cameron was forced to rely on a



variety of conventions taken from both the art and photography of the time in order to render visible the *invisible*. In her portrait photographs (consisting mostly of famous men), Cameron made creative use of focus and lighting in order to attempt to visually express the inner intellectual or creative “greatness” of such sitters as Tennyson or Sir Henry Taylor. In her art photographs of “Fair Women,” Cameron strategically used posing, gesture, and facial expression in order to express and emphasize the strength, emotional complexity, and most of all, the humanness of her subjects, thereby subverting the tendencies of Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites to idealize and objectify women into one “self-same face” painted “over and over.”

Even though photographic technology had vastly improved during Cameron’s career, it still took several minutes of exposure time to create a successful photo. Therefore, objects in motion could not yet be captured with the kind of spontaneity that would be available to the photographer after Kodak’s unveiling of an instant image process during the latter decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup> Yet Cameron clearly exerted a great deal of effort in order to suggest motion and activity in her female *subjects*, as a means of visually asserting women’s place in art (and, perhaps, in culture) as more than silent, static, and passive objects; the blurriness of *Rebecca* (**Fig. 10**), for example, shows the visual result of arrested movement.

**Figs. 11 and 12** exemplify the ways in which Cameron and Pre-Raphaelite painters like Rossetti make different use of visual and spatial positioning of the women within the artistic frame in order to express the strength and active agency (or in the case of Rossetti,

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<sup>18</sup> Those interested in Kodak’s transformation of the photographic technology should consult Naomi Rosenblum’s book, *A History of Women Photographers*.



the helpless passivity) of the female figures depicted. In Rossetti's painting "Ecce Ancilla Domini!" (**Fig. 11**), the Virgin Mary is relegated to the margins of the scene, postured in a small, almost crouched position, as if she were trying to take up as little space as possible, while the forms and faces of Cameron's women often dominate the entire frame (**Fig. 12**). The Pre-Raphaelite women gaze downward, to the side, or off into the distance (**Figs. 3, 11**), as if bowing meekly and demurely under the power of the artist's--and also the spectator's--eroticizing look. Cameron's women, on the other hand, are often captured in the act of looking. They seem to return the spectator's gaze straight on, often with an air of defiance (**Figs. 5, 6, 12, 17**).

Cameron's photos not only foreground the physical mobility and vitality of both her real-life sitters and the female characters they were asked to portray, but they also suggest a startling level of emotional and intellectual complexity in these women. Cameron's sensitivity to the inner emotional existence of women is often frankly expressed upon the faces of the models in the photographs, who are depicted experiencing a complex variety of sentiments, from joy, to affectionate love, to sorrow, while her acknowledgement and emphasis of feminine intellectual strength is conveyed through her use of artistic symbolism, and through her choice of unconventional literary, historical, or allegorical female figures known for their cognitive and creative powers. **Fig. 13**, for example, depicts Hypatia, who, according to Debra N. Mancoff and Sylvia Wolf, was the daughter of Theon, a respected mathematician, and was herself a "brilliant lecturer on Neoplatonist philosophy," known for "her combination of wisdom and beauty" (230), while **Fig. 14** represents Zoe, a heroine of the Greek War of Independence, who, after the death of her father "during a Turkish attack on her homeland. . . . [was] [t]ransformed





from a timid young girl into an articulate orator, advocating resistance and revenge” (233). Other admirable female figures featured in Cameron’s repertoire of over 3,000 images include Sappho, the famous Greek poet of Lesbos, now considered a quintessential symbol of female creativity and desire, and Mnemosyne, the mother of all Muses, who, in Cameron’s rendering of her, was played by Pre-Raphaelite model and artist, Marie Spartali.<sup>19</sup>

While the contorted and fetishistically over-exaggerated features of the Pre-Raphaelite stunners deplete the humanness of the women depicted, the realness of Cameron’s sitters persists in her art photographs--not only because of the sense of motion or sentience she successfully captured, but because of her refusal to exaggerate the models’ real features, blur out flaws, or touch up technical imperfections in her photos, even when dealing with ideal or fictional subjects. As she wrote to Sir Edward Ryan, “. . . [the blemishes and imperfections] must I think remain. I could have touched them out but I am the only photographer who always issues untouched photographs and artists for this reason amongst others value my photographs” (qtd in Gernsheim 75). Thus, both due to what Pierre Bourdieu calls the “reality effect” that is inherently attached to the documentary medium of photography, and due to a deliberate an effort on Cameron’s part either to leave pre-existing flaws or, in some cases, even to play up imperfections by tousling her subjects’ hair (**Fig. 15**), or forcibly adding scratches and blemishes to the plates (**Fig. 16**), the raw humanness never truly disappears from either her idyllic or typical images.

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<sup>19</sup> According to Elisabeth Bronfen, “[a]s mother of the muses, Mnemosyne is also the mother of the source of poetic authority itself and as such the point of origination to be involved in the poetic act” (363).



Cameron's efforts to counter the tendency of photography to render its female subjects inert, static, and, in a manner of speaking, *dead*, seem to have succeeded, as many viewers have found her images to be both startlingly real and surprisingly alive.<sup>20</sup> Sir John Herschel, for example, wrote Cameron a letter after viewing her work at an exhibit in 1866 to express his wonder at her ability to vivify the subjects she captured with the camera: "That head of the 'Mountain Nymph, Sweet Liberty'. . . is really a most astonishing piece of high relief," he told her. "She is absolutely alive and thrusting out her head from the paper into the air" (qtd in Weaver 157) (**Fig. 17**).

My suggestion that Cameron resisted the prevailing tendencies of Pre-Raphaelite art to transform women into typified objects of the desiring masculine gaze may appear somewhat questionable when one notes that the women in Cameron's photographs are rarely, if ever, observed as themselves, outside the fictional role they are made to play in the *tableaux*, while the male subjects tend to appear most prominently in her series of "real-life" portraits. Often, it is only because of the photos' accompanying captions that Cameron's fictional photographs of Marys, mothers, and angels may be distinguished from her portraits of sitters such as the "real-life" mother of Virginia Woolf, Julia Duckworth (*née* Jackson) (**Figs. 18, 19**). Certainly, one may argue that such a fact may once again point to Cameron's tendency to idealize her female subjects and transform them into allegorical symbols. However, a contrary reading which is congruent with my previous chapter's discussion of the "womanliness masquerade" is that these photographs might

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<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes has suggested that the act of photography brings about a kind of death of the subject, while André Bazin describes photography as an art that "embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption" (qtd in Shawcross 86).



indicate a critique, on Cameron's part, of Victorian gender ideology--a critique which is expressed through an awareness, and consequent *exposure* of the contrived, performative nature of those socially prescribed roles which she and her female "Idylls of Real life" were called upon to play on the Victorian cultural "stage" of everyday life. In other words, after the manner suggested by Rivière's "masquerade" thesis, Cameron recognized women and masquerade to be essentially one and the same. Such a contention proves particularly compelling when analysing photographs like *Dora as the Bride/Mrs. Ewan Cameron* (**Fig. 8**), or *Mrs. Duckworth as Julia Jackson* (not figured here), the captions of which actually seem to encourage the viewer to note the performative aspect of the women depicted within the frames.

The sombre, almost troubled looks on the faces of many of Cameron's female subjects (for example, *Christabel*, **Fig. 20**), who are most often depicted participating in occasions or activities that were normally considered fulfilling and joyful in the life of a young Victorian woman, serve to further problematize any reading of Cameron's work as unequivocally promoting the "Angel in the House" ideology. The modern viewer is left to conjecture whether the women's grimaces are "accidental" evidence of the "real-life" tedium experienced by the live models whom Cameron pressed into posing for long durations before the camera, or whether such melancholic expressions are a conscious, deliberate statement on Cameron's part about women's--and indeed her own--fatigue with the constant role-playing they undertook every day as wives, mothers--or, would-be professional photographers.





In emphasizing the subversive potential of Cameron's life and art, however, one must not *overlook* the more conservative approaches to class, as well as gender, we find reiterated in both. Theoretically and aesthetically speaking, Cameron disdained the general tendencies in art and conventional photography to ignore the inner depths of a subject (particularly a female subject) and focus solely on the outer appearance. However, several critics have argued that, in some of her art photographs, Cameron actually visited upon her male subjects the same "representational violence" that befell the female Pre-Raphaelite models. For example, in *Women Artists and the Pre-Raphaelite Movement*, Jan Marsh and Pamela Gerrish Nunn offer the assessment that "Cameron's oeuvre shows that men could be generalised into a preferred type the same way as her male contemporaries liked to merge women into a model of womanhood; the search in her pictures for a heroic yet spiritual male yields the largest masculine presence to be found in the Pre-Raphaelite work of women" (182). In an interesting reversal of the conventional critical focus on Dante Gabriel Rossetti's obsession with his wife, Elizabeth Siddal, Victoria C. Olsen has also argued that Cameron used her husband Charles' "self-same face over and over" as the image of ideal masculinity. In her essay "Idylls of Real Life," Olsen notes how Cameron's photo of "the dazed, closed-eyed Merlin [who] was modelled by [her] husband Charles . . . explicitly immobilizes him, blinds him, and controls how he is seen" in the same manner Siddal was often rendered in Rossetti's paintings (**Fig. 21**) (378).

In her tireless pursuit of the perfect image, it has also been said that Cameron often tended to ignore the discomfort of her real-life subjects. This tendency towards neglect is evident in the diary entries of several of the models who were pressed into sitting for Mrs.



Cameron's pictures. A sitter known only as the Lady Amateur, for example, described a day of posing in Cameron's glass house as a day of torture:

The studio was very untidy and very uncomfortable. The exposure began. A minute went over and I felt as if I must scream; another minute, and the sensation was as if my eyes were coming out of my head; a third, and the back of my neck appeared to be afflicted with palsy; a fourth, and the crown, which was too large began to slip down my forehead; a fifth--but here I utterly broke down . . . (qtd in Hinton 35).

Another sitter called Cameron "neither mysterious nor awe-inspiring, but just a kind, exacting though benevolent, tyrant," who, very much like the wicked witch from the Hansel and Gretel fairy tale, could be found

. . . lying in wait some fine morning at her garden gate for the young ones passing down the road on their way to Farringford or to the sands of Freshwater Bay. "She's coming! She'll catch one of us!" And sure enough an arm would intercept the passage of some luckless wight, and, bribed by jars of preserve [sic] or other toothsome dainty the victim was led away to spend the sunny hours posing in the studio (qtd in Hinton 36).

In perhaps the worst case scenario that foregrounds not only the ideological violence involved in the process of changing a real woman into an allegorical image, but the actual physical violence often involved in both Cameron's technique of photo-taking, and in nineteenth-century artistic and photographic practices at their most extreme, Cameron was rumoured to have locked her adopted daughter Cyllena Wilson into a closet in order to create on the face of her model a more believable expression of Despair.<sup>21</sup> This particular anecdote finds an interesting correlative in the infamous story of Elizabeth Siddal and her near-fatal sitting as Ophelia for Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais. According to William Michael Rossetti,

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<sup>21</sup> Due to the extremely lengthy exposure time of early photographs, some photographers were known to use metal braces (that often looked rather like torture devices) to forcibly hold the head of the photographic subject upright and perfectly still. See Suren Lalvani's book *Photography, Vision and the Production of Modern Bodies* for more details.



Millais found an ‘old and dirty’ antique dress, ‘all flowered over in silver embroidery’ which Lizzie wore while lying in a tin bath full of water kept warm by an arrangement of oil lamps burning underneath. Then, ‘just as the picture was nearly finished, the lamps went out unnoticed by the artist, who was so intently absorbed in his work that he thought of nothing else, and the poor lady kept floating in the cold water till she was quite benumbed. She herself never complained of this . . . but the result was she contracted a severe cold’ (qtd in *Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* 31).

Cameron not only often neglected to notice the personal well-being of her female sitters; but, in her desire to “arrest all Beauty” and imbue the real with elements of the ideal, she has been charged with taking an escapist, rather than socially responsible approach to class distinctions in her life and her art. While the so-called social investigators were beginning to probe into the “heart of darkness” of Britain’s urban slumlands, employing the camera to document the appalling states of these areas and their impoverished inhabitants, Cameron removed the settings of her photographs to those chronologically or geographically distanced *topoi* so regularly presented in the art, literature, and poetry of the period, and dressed her working-class servants and local peasants (whom she patronizingly declared in her autobiography to be “very handsome”) as queens and Marys, before exploiting them for their aesthetic value by pressing them into service in the creation of elaborate *tableaux-vivants*-style images. These images were then circulated for the viewing pleasure of her bourgeois friends, in the form of fancy albums, or, later, for those members of the consuming public-at-large wealthy enough to purchase her high-priced work.

If, as I have herein suggested, Cameron held, and exhibited--though subtly--a resistance to prevailing ideologies of gender and representation, why is her approach to class in her photographs of “Fair Women” seemingly so evasive and so unself-critical? The apparent contradiction between Cameron’s subversive approach to Victorian





constructions of gender and her more conservative or “bourgeois” treatment of class has been linked to a number of sources by critics, including Cameron’s split desires to be both popular and *avant-garde*, or her belief in the levelling capabilities of art and beauty.<sup>22</sup>

However, I wish to suggest that this contradiction is more likely the result of Cameron’s attempts to negotiate between two conflicting--though sometimes overlapping--schools of thought she found herself immersed in daily, as both the close friend and professional partner of Alfred Lord Tennyson, who was at the forefront of a group of “subversive conservatives” at Cambridge in the 1830s, known as The Apostles, and as the wife of Charles Hay Cameron, a prominent Benthamite philosopher.<sup>23</sup> Above all, such contradictions further emphasize the impossibility of applying dichotomous thinking to the life and works of a woman who, in many ways, “defied description.”

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<sup>22</sup> In “Idylls of Real Life,” for example, Victoria C. Olsen speaks of how “Cameron’s work can be read as an endorsement of Victorian beliefs in the class-transcending and transformative powers of love and art” (385).

<sup>23</sup> According to Isobel Armstrong, Tennyson was at the forefront of a *coterie* known as the Cambridge Apostles during the 1830s whose primary objectives were to enact “a transformation of the mind and the country,” and, “through a re-education of the whole social imagination in the deep powers of myth,” regain “a lost sense of organic unity” that rapid economic, social, and political change were seen to have disrupted in Victorian Britain (31, 55-6). Considering Cameron’s close relationship to Tennyson, and the prominence of allegorical and typological subjects in her art photographs, it is not surprising that critics like Victoria C. Olsen, and Constance Relihan have aligned Cameron primarily with Tennyson and the conservative “intellectual formation” from which he developed. However, there are several points at which I think Cameron’s own ideology, particularly her approach to class, diverges from that of the Apostles--the most obvious one being Cameron’s active involvement in political and economic causes. Armstrong writes that, although the Apostles sought to transform “the mind and the country,” they did not advocate direct political action as a means of bringing about that change. Cameron, on the other hand, was reported to have headed up a relief campaign for sufferers of the Great Potato Famine in Ireland and also adopted several children after her own had grown. Such acts of humanitarianism may indicate that Cameron shared with her husband, Charles, a belief in the egalitarian teachings of the Benthamite philosophy. For a similar, but more developed discussion of Cameron’s paradoxical approach to class, Jennifer Pearson Yamashiro’s essay



## CHAPTER THREE

## “THE LADY VANISHES”: Mrs. Cameron “Performed” on the Late Twentieth-Century Cultural Stage

“I have a smiling face, she said,  
 I have a jest for all I meet,  
 I have a garland for my head  
 And all its flowers are sweet,  
 And so you call me gay, she said [ . . . ]

But in your bitter world, she said,  
 Face-joy’s a costly mask to wear;  
 ‘Tis bought with pangs long nourished,  
 And rounded to despair:  
 Grief’s earnest makes life’s play, she said.”

*Elizabeth Barrett Browning, from “The Mask.”*

“No, this is the Great Theatre of Life. Admission is free, but the taxation is mortal. You come when you can and leave when you must. The show is continuous. Good-night!”

*Robertson Davies*

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If ubiquity is any indication of an artist’s celebrity status, it would appear that, in the twentieth century, Julia Margaret Cameron seems to have finally gained the level of critical acclaim and social attention for her work which she so desperately sought, but, for the most part, did not receive in her own lifetime. After over a century of virtual obscurity,

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“*Idylls in Conflict*” is worth consulting. Like me, Pearson Yamashiro cites both conservative and subversive influences in Cameron’s class ideology.



several of Cameron's images can now be spotted gracing the covers of numerous stylish books, and many have been transformed into posters, greeting cards, and postcards. At any given time, at least one exhibition of Cameron's work may be found making its way from gallery to museum across North America and Britain--the latest being an intensive study of Cameron's photographs of women, entitled "Julia Margaret Cameron's Women," which commenced on September 19, 1998 at the Art Institute of Chicago, and, at the time of this thesis's publication, is expected to travel to the Museum of Modern Art, New York (27 January-4 May 1999), and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (27 August-30 November 1999).

Along with all the sudden popularity of Cameron's photographs has come an interest in the woman herself. In a somewhat ironic reversal of roles, Cameron, once considered one of the most pre-eminent practitioners of Victorian photography, has been taken from her place of hidden prominence behind the camera and made to pose as a central object of intrigue and interest, not only for a number of twentieth-century feminist scholars across the disciplines, but for several fiction writers, and, most recently, a contemporary film-maker. However, as I mentioned briefly in the introduction, while critics have been successful thus far in their crusades to recuperate the integrity of Cameron's photographs, and to ensure that they be taken seriously and valued as fine art, few have deigned to give the memory of the artist the same amount of respect and credibility.

It is the subject of this next and final chapter to examine the transformation of Julia Margaret Cameron from subject of the photographic gaze in Victorian England, to its aesthetic object of fascination in Britain and North America at the end of this century. My





primary concern here is with the potential “representational violence” that such a transformation may have incurred upon the memory of a woman artist who, ironically, often took it upon herself to counter such violence of representation in her own depictions of Victorian women. To achieve this end, I will endeavour to assess not only how the figure of Julia Margaret Cameron has been taken up by three modern artists--Virginia Woolf, Lynne Truss, and Sandra Goldbacher--but for what reason, and to what end Cameron has been changed from a real woman to a somewhat farcical character. Before beginning this analysis, however, it is important to point out that it is not the intent of this chapter to further any such “representational violence” on the memory of a clearly determined, capable, vigorous and talented woman, by defining her as solely a passive, helpless “victim” of violence--ideological, representational, or otherwise. On the contrary, as in the previous chapters, it is my desire to continue to emphasize Cameron’s agency in the economies of gender and self representation. Thus, while I am suggesting that Cameron’s image has fallen prey to a kind of “representational violence” at the hands of twentieth-century artists, it is important that I once again assert Cameron’s own participation in the creation and perpetuation of her own image. That is, if Julia Margaret Cameron has been--and continues to be--constructed in a particular manner (whether as the ideal bourgeois woman or as the wildly eccentric amateur photographer), it is because she herself, in some part, contributed to that very construction, through the careful orchestration of her public autobiography, her portrait photograph, and indeed, her own social persona, using a deliberate performance of the “masquerade of womanliness” in the public eye.



The comedic play, *Freshwater*, by Virginia Woolf, Cameron's great-niece, is the earliest, if not the most famous of three known literary works to be written specifically about Julia Margaret Cameron in the twentieth century. Written in 1928 and performed for the first time in 1935 at Vanessa Bell's famous London studio, *Freshwater* provides a humorous--though often scathingly critical--look at the eccentricities and incongruencies of Julia Margaret Cameron and her Victorian contemporaries. Using established literary conventions of irony and parody, Woolf creates depictions of such eminent Victorians as George Frederick Watts, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and even Her Majesty, Queen Victoria, that are at once outrageously overdone (to the point of caricature) and refreshingly honest and real.

In her depictions of famous nineteenth-century stage actress, Ellen Terry, and her short, tumultuous marriage to George Frederick Watts, Woolf shows a profound understanding, and a deep sympathy, not only for Terry, but for many women who, like Woolf, and like "Great-Aunt Julia," found themselves forced into certain unrealistic or unnatural "poses" by male artists, husbands, or the culture at large. Like Cameron's photographs of "Fair Women," Ellen Terry's response to the question of what her name is, posed by a prospective suitor unaware of her married status, reveals the character's--as well as the playwright's--awareness of, and discontent with, women's objectified status in art (or art photography), and, more generally, in patriarchal culture:

John: "My name's Craig. Lieutenant John Craig of Her Majesty's Navy."

Nell: "And my name is Mrs. George Frederick Watts."

John: "But haven't you got another?"

Nell: "Oh plenty! Sometimes I'm Modesty. Sometimes I am Poetry. Sometimes I am Chastity. Sometimes, generally before breakfast, I am merely Nell."

John: "I like Nell best."

Nell: "Well, that's unlucky, because today I'm Modesty. . . . Dear me, I suppose



I'm an abandoned wretch. Everyone says how proud I ought to be. Think of hanging in the Tate Gallery for ever and ever--what an honour for a young woman like me! Only--isn't it awful--I like swimming."

John: "And sitting on a rock, Nell?"

Nell: "Well, it's better than that awful model's throne . . ." (26-27).

Despite her apparent understanding for women's issues, and her deep interest in the life and works of her eccentric great aunt, however, Virginia Woolf's characterization of Julia Margaret Cameron in *Freshwater* proves flat and unsympathetic when compared to her *pathos*-filled depiction of Terry in the play, or even to the laudatory description of Cameron presented by Woolf only three years earlier, in her introduction to a published version of Cameron's photographs. For in *Freshwater*, the woman whom Woolf had once described as generous, vigorous, and immensely talented, is reduced to a caricatured performance--a character so monomaniacal in pursuit of her art that she will stop at nothing short of murder (albeit of the family's "pet" turkey) in order to forward her photographic cause:

Mrs. C: "[N]ow you're the Muse. But the Muse must have wings. [Mrs. C. rummages frantically in a chest. She flings out various garments on the floor.] Towels, sheets, pyjamas, trousers, dressing gowns, braces--braces but no wings. Trousers but no wings. What a satire upon modern life! Braces but no wings! [Mrs. C. goes to the door and shouts:] Wings! Wings! Wings! What d'you say, Mary. There are no wings? Then kill the turkey!" . . . .

Ellen: "Oh, Mrs. Cameron, have you killed the turkey? And I was so fond of that bird."

Mrs. C.: "The turkey is happy, Ellen. The turkey has become part and parcel of my immortal art. Now, Ellen. Mount this chair. Throw your arms out. Look upwards" (14).

In the final scene of the play, Mrs. Cameron shows herself to be an exaggerated version of the kind of "benevolent though exacting tyrant" spoken of by a young Annie Thackeray Ritchie. When it is thought that young Ellen has drowned herself in the sea, Cameron





mourns the loss of her favourite model, but has little cares for the well-being of the girl herself: “Mrs. C.: ‘Oh but this is awful! The girl’s dead and where am I to get another model for the Muse? Are you sure, Signor, that she’s quite dead? Not a spark of life left in her? Couldn’t something be done to revive her? Brandy--where’s the brandy?’” (40).

Why Woolf’s ruthlessly satirical--and decidedly hollow--portrayal of Julia Margaret Cameron and her fellow Freshwater eccentrics? As I have previously suggested, such depictions of the famous fine art photographer is, in part, Cameron’s own doing: Cameron played the role of the bumbling amateur so convincingly, and emphasized her “feminine” dependency and inferiority so vigorously, that critics and biographers certainly must have found it difficult to regard her as little more than a flighty, quaintly humorous and surprisingly child-like individual.

Another particularly compelling argument, offered by prominent Victorianist Isobel Armstrong in her own search for the source of a continuous twentieth-century devaluation of Victorian poets and their poetry, is that such over-blown representations of Cameron and her fellow Victorians may be directly related to the Modernist movement--a movement in which Virginia Woolf played a central part. According to Armstrong, Modernism’s primary agenda was to mark a “radical break with the past”--the past, of course, being the epoch directly preceding it: the Victorian period. Thus, central to the process of self-definition of the Modernist movement and the self-definition of its artistic disciples, was the necessary disavowal of, and dissociation from, those “Other” Victorians. In the literary domain, the most common strategy of dissociation used by Modernist writers to “repress whatever . . . relations the Victorians [seemed] to bear to twentieth-century writing” (1), and to their own work, involved the use of ironic wit and humour to



belittle, mock, or at the very least, *discredit* their ostensibly stodgy Victorian grandparents. Armstrong provides several telling examples of this process of writerly disavowal; in James Joyce's epic Modernist novel *Ulysses*, for example, Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate of the Victorian Age, becomes "Lawn Tennyson, gentleman poet," and amateur tennis player. Similarly, in Virginia Woolf's work *Orlando*, Woolf is seen trying to dissociate herself from the Victorians by critiquing "the eroticisms and the euphemisms of bourgeois capitalism and its ideology, its inordinate excesses and concealments," using the image of a "voluptuous . . . stuffed sofa." (1).

Considering that *Freshwater* was written expressly for the enjoyment of that famous Modernist *coterie*, the Bloomsbury group, Armstrong's thesis of "Modernist Repression" provides a useful and enlightening frame through which to view Woolf's play. Further, it does much to help explain the discrepancy between Woolf's sympathetic take on Cameron in *Famous Men and Fair Women*, and her more critical approach to her great-aunt in *Freshwater*.

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However problematic its representation of Cameron, Woolf's play has undoubtedly set the precedent for the ways in which critics and writers alike have approached Julia Margaret Cameron throughout the twentieth century. Even in the last decades of the 1990s, the supposed age of the *Post-Modern*, evidence of Woolf's influence over the cultural construction of the woman photographer continues to surface; the most recent example is Lynne Truss's 1997 novel, *Tennyson's Gift*, which, like Woolf's *Freshwater*, undertakes to depict Mrs. Cameron and her Freshwater artistic *coterie* in a comical, and often critical, light.



Using an amusingly effective “Wonderland” intertext, Truss likens Cameron and the painters, poets, phrenologists and actors who gather around her at Dimbola Lodge, to the madcap characters found inhabiting Lewis Carroll’s classic story of the little girl who falls down the rabbit hole. In the novel’s opening scene, for example, Cameron’s maid-servants are relieved temporarily from their duties as photographic models, and commissioned by their Queen of Hearts, Mrs. Cameron, to paint the red roses white:

A blazing dusty July afternoon at Freshwater Bay; and up at Dimbola Lodge, with a glorious loud to-do, the household of Mrs. Julia Margaret Cameron is mostly out of doors, applying paint to the roses. They run around the garden in the sunshine, holding up skirts and aprons, and jostle on the path. For reasons they dare not inquire, the red roses must be painted white. If anyone asked them to guess, they would probably say, ‘Because it’s Wednesday?’ ‘You’re splashing me!’ ‘Look out!’ ‘We’ll never get done in time!’ ‘What if she comes and we’re not finished?’ ‘It will be off with our heads!’ (3).

By making an explicit comparison between Cameron and that sometimes benevolent, but often testy, and always exacting tyrant of Wonderland, the Queen of Hearts, it would appear that Truss’s approach to Julia Margaret Cameron is, after the manner of Woolf, unsympathetic and primarily parodic. Certainly, it is evident throughout the novel that Truss, like Woolf, relishes in poking strategically veiled jabs at Cameron, particularly at her eccentric habits, and her notorious tendency to lose herself in her art, and put her relentless pursuit of the perfect image before the personal comfort of the sundry friends, neighbours, and servants whom she pressed into sitting before the camera. In chapter two, Truss mounts one such critique through the mouth of Charles Do-Do-Dodgson, Cameron’s photographing rival, whose notorious love of children makes him another primary target of Truss’s scathing one-liners in the text:

Back in Freshwater, outside Mrs. Cameron’s house, Dodgson wonders what on earth





is going on. . . . Perhaps Mrs. Cameron has ordered her grass to be painted green, so that it will look fresh and emerald from an upstairs window. Knowing of his fellow photographer's boundless and misguided devotion to aesthetics, such lunatic set-dressing is certainly possible. Mrs. Cameron is forever making extravagant gestures in the cause of Art and Friendship, both with capital letters. She is a bohemian (at the very word Dodgson shudders), with sisters of exceptional beauty and rich husbands. She hails from Calcutta, and burns incense. While Dodgson takes pictures only of gentlemen (and gentleman's children), Mrs. Cameron poses shop-boys and servants for her dreamy Pre-Raphaelite conceits. In short, in terms of exotic personality, she is quite off Dodgson's map. He has heard that she will sometimes run out of the house, Indian shawls trailing, stirring a cup of tea on its saucer! Out of doors! If in London, she will do this on the street! And sometimes, she gives away the photographs she takes, the act of a madwoman! (7).

Yet despite its similarly comedic approach to the Freshwater *coterie*, and to the Victorians in general, Truss's representation of Julia Margaret in *Tennyson's Gift* nevertheless reveals itself to be markedly different from Woolf's portrayal of her in *Freshwater*. While Woolf reduces Cameron to a parodic caricature whose sole function is to provide comic relief in the play, Truss takes great pains to "flesh" out the photographer's inner emotional and intellectual workings, much after the manner of Cameron herself, who went to great length to capture the "rare harmonies" of her sitters' "inner complexions." A most effective example of Truss's astute ability as a writer to vivify her fictional subjects, and to map out their imaginary emotional landscapes in a believable and sympathetic manner, appears during a scene in the latter part of the novel, wherein Mrs. Cameron and Tennyson share a particularly personal moment in Julia's glass house, after rushing there to escape an unexpected downpour and a disastrous dinner party:

Outside, in the garden, Julia caught up with Alfred Tennyson, as the wind lashed the trees above their heads, and the rain fell on their faces. . . .

"Alfred!" yelled Julia above the wind.

"It's no good, Julia. My mind is made up."

"Alfred!"



They could have gone on like this, but fortunately Julia thought of sheltering in the glass house, where at least they could hear each other speak. And so they entered Julia's hallowed place, where Alfred had never stepped before, and the conflicting emotions Julia had demanded from Mr. Watts as Ulysses were as nothing to the feelings now fighting in her own breast like cross winds tearing at a sail.

"I can't believe you would leave me, Alfred," she wailed. "Just because I have never spoken to you of my feelings, you must surely know what they are."

"Julia, I think we should discuss this tomorrow. Or perhaps, even better, we should never discuss it at all. It pains me to see you like this!" . . .

Julia looked around. There was something about the setting. She never thought she would see Alfred in her glass house. She had wanted it so much that it had nearly broken her heart.

"Sit for me, Alfred," she said quietly.

"You do not listen, madam!"

"But I do, Alfred. I do. And each word you speak pains me a great deal more than it pains you . . ." (178).

Certainly, it may be argued that both Truss's somewhat romantic elaborations of Julia's life (most particularly, her provocative reading of the nature of Cameron's relationship with Tennyson), and her inclusion of Cameron as a character in her fictional novel, may commit a kind of "representational violence" upon the memory of Cameron, the historical figure. But even as her depiction blurs even further the fine line between fact and fiction, and between Cameron the "real" historical being and her socially constructed persona, as it transforms her from "a real body to a sign," I hesitate to call Truss's treatment of Cameron as inherently "violent" as the ones presented by Woolf, Gernsheim or others. According to Elisabeth Bronfen, from whose own work I have borrowed the concept of "representational violence," a violent depiction is one that "efface[s] . . . the subjectivity of the . . . woman, her body and her pain" (49). While Woolf's portrayal of Cameron is completely devoid of any sense of interiority, Truss's depiction offers glimpses of a deeper and, in some respects, darker side of Cameron that critics like Helmut Gernsheim may have hinted at, but have tended to downplay or deflect attention away from in their



insistent reading of Cameron as the flighty, feminine amateur. With the aid of an omniscient narrative perspective, the reader of Truss's novel is able to penetrate the light-hearted, eccentric outer mask of Mrs. Cameron and gain compelling (if highly conjectural) insight into Cameron's doubts about her abilities, as well as her potential for future success, her fears of failure and rejection, and her desires for acceptance, for success, and for a open and profound relationship with Tennyson: insight that has been notably absent from virtually every representation of the woman photographer (be it "factual" biography or comical fiction) to have appeared in the last century. As a result, like Cameron's photograph of the *Mountain Nymph*, whom Herschel declared to be so startlingly alive she seemed to be "thrusting out her head from the paper into the air," Julia Margaret Cameron emerges from the pages of *Tennyson's Gift* as a generous, sympathetic, touchingly kind, but deeply complex individual, whom only those who really knew the woman (before she became a caricature) could verify that she was in "real life."

\*

Although Julia Margaret Cameron's presence in the 1998 film, *The Governess*, is more subtle, and, thus, perhaps less visible to those not familiar with either the Victorian woman photographer or her ethereal photographs, it is nonetheless unmistakable. Being the most recent "text" to take Cameron as its subject, a short analysis of this film merits inclusion here.

The main action of *The Governess* revolves around a young Victorian woman named Rosina (played by British actress Minnie Driver), a Sephardic Jew from London's East End, who is forced to seek employment after the death of her father leaves their once affluent family destitute. Posing as a Christian by changing her name to Mary





Blackchurch, she gains employment as a governess with a wealthy family on the remote Isle of Skye. Although it pays decently, the governess position is anything but ideal. Mrs. Cavendish, her female employer, is vapid and moody, and her wayward and sadistic young charge, Clementina (whose name, incidentally, may be an indirect nod on the part of the film-maker to another fore-mother of photography, Lady Clementina Hawarden), delights in driving her nanny to distraction by knocking her heel incessantly against the desk and sneaking dead mice into her bed. The only source of excitement and intrigue in the bright, vibrant woman's life is provided by her mistress's mysterious husband, Charles, a scientist whom Rosina only catches momentarily glimpses of through her window, coming and going from his private laboratory. Charles' secret project, Rosina discovers one afternoon after visiting his lab at her master's invitation, is a marvellous process called photography, whereby pictures of reality are reproduced onto paper, using a camera and light-sensitive chemicals. Like Henry Fox Talbot (the British scientist who, contemporaneously with Jacques Louis Daguerre, discovered photography, but did not unveil his findings before Daguerre's own revelation of the process to the world, thereby losing patent rights to the discovery), Charles has almost mastered the process of photo-taking, but cannot figure out how to stop the pictures from fading. Rosina, being the bright, ambitious girl that she is, accepts Charles' offer to become his part-time laboratory assistant. Soon thereafter, Rosina discovers a fixative, and, in the style of *Jane Eyre*, a love affair literally "develops" between employer and employee.

Despite their passion for photography and for each other, Rosina and Charles clearly have very divergent ideas about the new medium and its uses. In several scenes, the director, Sandra Goldbacher, ingeniously uses her characters to literalize the two sides



of the Victorian debate on photography, with Charles standing in for Fox Talbot and other amateur photographers of the Realist school, and Rosina/Mary Blackchurch as a Cameronesque fine art photographer. “You can create such beauty,” Rosina remarks, as she gazes at a set of prints created by Charles, hanging to dry. Charles, the eternal rationalist, has other opinions: “My aim,” he tells her tersely, “is to make a faithful and scientific record of reality, Miss Blackchurch.” “It’s another means of expression,” Miss Blackchurch insists. Exasperated, Charles replies that she possesses “neither a very rational nor empirical point of view, but imaginative nonetheless.”<sup>24</sup>

While the disclaimer at the end of the film states that the story is entirely fictitious and that “any resemblances the characters may have to any persons living or dead is entirely coincidental,” the essence of Julia Margaret Cameron--her character, her aesthetic principles, and her art--pervades this film. Rosina’s fascination with the medium, her insatiable desire to explore its potential to record “a likeness of a human face” and “capture the essence of people” reflects Cameron’s own aspirations to elevate photography to the status of fine art, and to capture the “inner complexions” of her sitters. Similarly, the photograph entitled “a biblical study in the manner of Raphael,” which she desires to make with Charles, and the photographs she later creates in her own

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<sup>24</sup> While an often insightful and compelling writer and director, Goldbacher seems a bit too reliant on overly simplistic and problematically essentialised dichotomies in her creation of the characters, Rosina and Charles, and the interactions between them. In the preceding passage, for example, while Charles’ comments to Rosina on her “irrational” point of view play into and play out to the pedestrian viewer a sample of the Victorian debates about the function of photography and its potential as an art form, they also reflect and perpetuate a stereotypical alignment of the masculine position with “reason,” “science,” and “empiricism,” and of the feminine with “emotion,” “beauty,” and “subjective expressivity.” Other viewers have found that the film takes a similarly dichotomous approach to race and religion. Brian D. Johnson, for example, sees Goldbacher’s representations of Rosina and Charles as not only a means of playing out an essentialist battle of the sexes but also a dangerously over-simplified “duel between Semitic passion and Christian rationality” (51).



photographic studio in London, reveal a distinctly Cameronian artistic vision, both in their “hazy” style and their allegorical and mythical content.

This film is of particular interest, not only because of its unique treatment of photographic history, and its subtle references to Cameron’s life and art, but for the ways in which it, like many of Cameron’s photographs, subverts the traditional visual economy of “male/subject” and “female/object.” Not only is the film the product of a female look (the look being that of director Sandra Goldbacher), but it celebrates (heterosexual) women’s power over, and pleasures derived from, the act of looking. At moments, certainly, the camera lingers fetishistically over Rosina’s (and by extension, Driver’s) face and body, after the manner of the classic films described by Laura Mulvey in her essay on “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Nevertheless, unlike the narrative films Mulvey analyzes, which place women as “to-be-looked-at” objects of a masculinised filmic and spectatorial gaze in the cinematic frame, in Goldbacher’s film Rosina is figured as the main protagonist, through whose eyes the film’s viewers both *figuratively*, and, through the strategic use of filmic focalization, often *literally* see the narrative action. The “male/subject,” “female/object” dichotomy is further broken down through the replacement of the more conventional scenes of female nudity with a visual exploration of the nude male form. Thus, as Brian D. Johnson points out in his review of the film for *Maclean’s* magazine, “this is one of those rare movies with more male than female nudity” (51). Goldbacher’s subversion of the traditional filmic visual economy, enacted both through her use of an active female protagonist, and her own appropriation of the masculine gaze as a female film-maker making a film about women looking, is further





reflected in Rosina's symbolic theft of both her employer's camera, and a nude image of Charles, posed Christ-like, which she literally *takes* of him as he sleeps.

\*

Goldbacher's film offers a great deal of promise to Cameron scholars such as myself, who wish to recuperate the integrity of her reputation, which has, until recently, been almost completely undermined. However, such positive revaluations of Cameron, her life, and her art, will need to be more direct in their reference to the pioneer art photographer, if we are to alter the social construction of Julia Margaret Cameron. Mike Weaver suggests that "there was nothing pseudonymous about Julia Margaret Cameron." In future, it is my hope that artists like Sandra Goldbacher will be similarly explicit in their praise of Mrs. Cameron and her photographs.



## CODA

As was pointed out in the introductory chapter, this thesis takes its cues from many previous critics and their studies of the life and art of Victorian art photographer, Julia Margaret Cameron. But while my own work has been necessarily influenced and informed by such notable scholars as Deborah Cherry, Carol Mavor, and Pamela Gerrish Nunn--only to name a few--there have been many moments during this endeavour when I have found myself manoeuvring across uncharted territory *alone*, and without any prior critical footsteps to follow. It seems that previous critics have been so concerned with Cameron's art photographs, and most often, her "Idylls" photographs, that they have not only left neglected a vast canon of fascinating studies of "Fair Women," but they have also forgotten Cameron's talents as a writer, translator, and poet. I experienced a similar problem in locating secondary materials for the texts in Chapter Three, which take Julia Margaret Cameron more as an aesthetic object than as a photographing subject. This paucity of scholarly material is more understandable for Truss's novel and Goldbacher's movie, due to the relatively recent release dates of both these texts--less so for Virginia Woolf's farcical play, *Freshwater*, which, surprisingly enough, does not appear to have been closely studied in an academic context since it was first performed in the 1930s. My work thus attempts not only to fill in several discernible gaps in contemporary work on Julia Margaret Cameron, but to broaden the context within which scholars regard her life and her art.





Fig. 1. Lewis Carroll, *Julia Margaret Cameron and her Sons, Charles and Henry*, ca. 1858.



Fig. 2. Henry Herschel Cameron, *Portrait of Julia Margaret Cameron*, 1870.







Fig. 3. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *The Roseleaf*, 1870.



Fig. 4. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Pre-Raphaelite Study*, 1870.





Fig. 5. Julia Margaret Cameron, *L'Incoronata*, ca. 1865.



Fig. 6. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Shadow of the Cross*, 1865.





Fig. 7. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Angel in the House*, 1871.







Fig. 8. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Dora as the Bride/Mrs. Ewan Cameron*, 1870.



Fig. 9. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Passion Flower at the Gate*, 1867





Fig. 10. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Rebecca*, 1870.







Fig. 11. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Ecce Ancilla Domine!*, 1850.







Fig. 12. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Pomona*, 1872.





Fig. 13. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Hypatia*, 1867.







Fig. 14. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Zoe, Maid of Athens*, 1866/70.







Fig. 15. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Angel at the Tomb*, 1870.



Fig. 16. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Holy Family*, 1864.





Fig. 17. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Mountain Nymph, Sweet Liberty*, 1866.







Fig. 18. Julia Margaret Cameron, *The Echo*, 1868.







Fig. 19. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Julia Jackson*, 1864/65.





Fig. 20. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Christabel*, 1866.







Fig. 21. Julia Margaret Cameron, *Vivien and Merlin*, 1874.





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## APPENDIX

### “On a Portrait”

By Julia Margaret Cameron

Oh, mystery of Beauty! who can tell  
Thy mighty influence? who can best descry  
How secret, swift, and subtle is the spell  
Wherein the music of thy voice doth lie?

Here we have eyes so full of fervent love,  
That but for lids behind which sorrow's touch  
Doth press and linger, one could almost prove  
That Earth had loved her favourite over much.

A mouth where silence seems to gather strength  
From lips so gently closed, that almost say,  
‘Ask not my story, lest you hear at length  
Of sorrows where sweet hope has lost its way.’

And yet the head is borne so proudly high,  
The soft round cheek, so splendid in its bloom,  
True courage rises thro’ the brilliant eye,  
And great resolve comes flashing thro’ the gloom.

Oh, noble painter! more than genius goes  
To search the key-notes of those melodies,  
To find the depths of all those tragic woes,  
Tune thy song right and paint rare harmonies.

Genius and love have each fulfilled their part,  
And both unite with force and equal grace,  
Whilst all that we love best in classic art  
Is stamped for ever on the immortal face.

(Dated September, 1875; published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, XXXIII (February 1876), 372. Reprinted in Weaver, *Julia Margaret Cameron, 1815-1879*, 158).





## CURRICULUM VITAE

Jill Marie MacLachlan

University of Alberta

1999

Jill Marie MacLachlan is a native of Edmonton, Alberta. She earned a B.A. with Distinction in English and Linguistics from the University of Alberta in 1997, before entering the English Master's program at the U of A in September of that same year. It was during her six year stint at the University of Alberta that Jill not only discovered her passion for "all things Victorian," but also for "Inga's Night Out," and for a golden elixir, known to novices as *Strongbow*, but to Jill and her seasoned "Black Dog" friends as "inspiration on tap."

When she is not immersed in Victorian triple-deckers, battling "thesis monsters," or being the "conference paper coquette," Jill can be found enjoying the outdoors: on foot, on skis, or (during Edmonton's disappointingly short summer months), on wheels. She is currently awaiting word about possible acceptance into a Ph.d. program that is within Canada and "near the sea."

















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